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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

St Bernadette's Primary School
Belfast

Inspected: April 2009

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Bernadette's Primary School** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 20/04/2009**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 103-0317** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	25	29	18	19	-
Enrolments					
Primary	242	227	212	186	173
Reception	-	-	-	-	-
Nursery Class/Classes	-	-	-	-	-
Special Unit	-	-	-	-	-

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
 (expressed as a percentage):

90.3

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 11 - -
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 15.72 NI PTR: 20.8
- iii. Average Class Size: 21.62
- iv. Class Size (Range): 17 to 24
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|------|
| i. Clerical support: | 30 |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | 30 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 47.5 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.73%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 30.05%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 71%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Bernadette's Primary School is situated in Glenalina Road in the Ballymurphy area of west Belfast. The school's enrolment has fallen steadily over the past few years and currently stands at 173. Almost all of the children come from the surrounding housing estate. Over 70% of the children are entitled to free school meals, and the school has identified just over 30% who require additional help with their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English / literacy and mathematics and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English / literacy and mathematics. The inspection team also evaluated the school's arrangements for Pastoral Care, including Child Protection.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6. An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

Of the 153 questionnaires issued to the parents, 14% were returned and seven of these contained a written comment. Almost all of the parental responses were very supportive of the work of the school. Nine of the teachers completed the online questionnaire, and almost all of these responses were also highly supportive of the school. The governors spoke very positively about the school and mentioned in particular the effective leadership of the Principal, the caring and supportive staff and the good quality of the provision, which included courses for parents. The children in year 6 talked enthusiastically about the many aspects of life in school they enjoy such as the choir, drama, art and problem-based learning. They indicated that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The provision for pastoral care within the school is very good. In recent years, the teachers, led effectively by the Principal, have undertaken a review of strategies to promote positive behaviour and introduced a new whole-school approach. This is underpinned by a focus on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding in the curriculum, the very effective use of circle time sessions to address pertinent school issues and the monthly value which is emphasised in assembly and reinforced where appropriate during class. A key feature of the pastoral system has been the development of a safe and inclusive playground environment, with a buddy system to encourage the children to avail of the activities on offer at lunch times. The School Council has been involved in introducing resources to support creative and imaginative play for the playground. There is good evidence that these interventions are having a positive impact on the children's motivation and behaviour.

The staff contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children. The teachers have high expectations of the children, encouraging them to be well-behaved and mannerly and to take pride in their work. The children are friendly and courteous, and respond well to the staff's expectations; their behaviour is outstanding. The school has a very successful choir and drama group, and these have been important in raising the self-esteem and confidence of the girls who participate and the school community as a whole. In addition, the children's learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest, participation in competitions and festivals and visitors to the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. It is appropriate that the school has made arrangements for the designated governor to receive updated training in Child Protection and for the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson of the governors to review the Record of Child Abuse Complaints at least annually. In addition, there is a need for the staff to complete risk assessments for school trips.

1.6 HEALTH EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the fruit tasting event and the daily discussions about health topics.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS

The school has developed very effective relationships with parents and they are invited into the school on a regular basis for assemblies and other events, many taking place in the newly refurbished Parents' Room. The parents are involved in their child's learning from the youngest classes. Information sessions are held in the school to keep parents up to date with new initiatives such as Linguistic Phonics. They are also given practical advice on how to help their child at home through, for example, The Flying Start Programme. Written information for parents is provided in a variety of formats. A regular newsletter celebrates the achievements of children and helps keep parents up to date with events in the school.

A designated Parents' Support Worker, who is employed through the Extended Schools Initiative, co-ordinates a number of programmes which involve the parents. Some of these programmes take place off site and are accredited.

1.8 EXTRA CURRICULAR

A large number of children benefit from the opportunity to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities such as music, drama and sporting activities, including the very successful Basketball Club. The school also offers a range of extra curricular activities to the children through the Extended Schools Initiative. These include ICT, drama, guitar lessons, the Breakfast Club and the Extended Learning Club.

1.9 OTHER LINKS

The school actively engages with the local community and other schools in the area, both nursery and post-primary. Funding for various initiatives has been secured through involvement with the Corpus Christi Fully Serviced Schools' Network. Financial support has also been obtained from the Department of Regional Development - Integrated Services for Children Programme. The development of a new community playground, to be used by both St Bernadette's Primary School and the local nursery school, has been made possible through the securing of a substantial grant from the Big Lottery Fund.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children work very well in class, demonstrating high levels of motivation and perseverance in their work; they have a positive attitude to their learning. Starting in the younger classes, the children are encouraged by their teachers to work both independently and collaboratively in pairs and in groups. The teachers provide the children with a wide range of opportunities to develop their thinking skills and their understanding.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The provision for English and literacy is managed and co-ordinated consistently and effectively within and across each key stage; the quality of the provision is very good. Teachers' planning provides a sound basis for progression, breadth and coherence in the children's developments in talking and listening, including drama, writing and reading and also ensures that the modes of language are well integrated in the classroom. By the end of Key Stage (KS) 2, most of the children make very good progress and achieve well in English.

The good variety of well-selected fiction and non-fiction books, the use of appropriate software and the Internet, the display of the children's written, illustrated work and of language aids all make for a rich literacy environment throughout the school.

The children are encouraged and taught from an early stage to listen to each other, to articulate, to recognise sounds, letters and words and to develop their independent writing. The teachers are auditing appropriately the detail of some early language activities as well as the role of play-based learning to ensure that it effectively supports the development of literacy and numeracy. Throughout the three key stages, the teachers' effective planning for problem-based, question-based and 'drama into writing' approaches to teaching provides opportunities for the children to develop both their thinking and their communication skills through purposeful activities. The children are able to observe, explore, co-operate, discuss, make good use of mathematical language and be creative across all areas of learning.

Reading standards are very good for most of the children. Reading is valued and promoted, and books are enjoyed by the children and teachers. The teaching of reading is effected through a range of appropriate resources, including ICT applications and the suitable collections of non-fiction and fiction books, rather than through a single reading scheme. In addition, the development of reading through linguistic phonics is skilfully woven into the reading and listening activities which form part of the lesson topic, rather than being taught in

isolation. The teachers are developing explicit links between the linguistic phonics and the reading recovery methods employed as the children progress through the school. The teaching of reading is coherent and indicates clear progression for most children, with a focus on reading recovery for the children with identified needs.

Writing is taught within the wide context of literacy which underpins the whole curriculum; it is varied, purposeful and at times creative, without being restricted by unnecessary, isolated writing exercises. A wide range of styles and purposes for writing are evident and the very best is high quality, fluent and extensive. The children benefit considerably from authors who visit the school and share their writing craft. In several classes, the children write, illustrate, produce and present stories for the younger children; the older children collaborate in producing a school newsletter.

There is evidence of breadth in the variety of uses of ICT in some classrooms, including digital video-making and internet-based research, yet ICT is not consistently exploited to this level across the school. It is appropriate that the use of ICT is identified in the school development plan for the next academic year.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is very good. The children have a positive attitude to mathematics; they work well in groups and co-operate freely during practical sessions. The majority of the children in KS1 and KS2 achieve very good standards in mathematics as indicated by the wide range of performance data held by the school.

The children's mathematical experiences are developed systematically and are characterised by the appropriate use of practical materials and the frequent opportunities to apply their learning to problem-solving and investigative activities. Throughout the three key stages, the consistent and effective development of the children's mental mathematical strategies promotes good flexibility in their mathematical thinking and they talk confidently about their understanding of mathematics. In almost every class, the children focus well on their teachers' explanation of new concepts and the follow-on work is well matched to the abilities of the children. The children's written work, in class, and for homework, demonstrates their competence in a range of mathematical skills and processes. On occasions, mathematics-based computer programs were available to consolidate further the children's understanding of important concepts and to extend their skill at problem-solving.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers' planning is very effective, they co-operate closely with one another and they prepare well for their lessons. The detailed planning enables the teachers to carry out frequent monitoring and tracking and to make predictions about each child's progress. By analysing the detailed assessment and qualitative information gathered, the teachers regularly draw out the implications for their teaching and review its quality and effectiveness; the range of relevant information is used well to inform action planning and modify lesson plans. Such effective self-evaluation and the overall auditing and co-ordination of the literacy and

numeracy policies by the literacy co-ordinator, the numeracy co-ordinator and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures that learning opportunities are well matched to the ability of each child, tailored help is provided to those who need it and their progression is maximised.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, nearly all of the teaching observed was very good, with one in six lessons judged to be of outstanding quality. In the majority of the lessons, the work was well paced, imaginative and was matched closely to the needs and abilities of the children within the class. The intended learning was shared with the children at the beginning, and at the end of lessons there was review and consolidation of the learning. The teachers employed a wide range of teaching strategies to develop active learning. They were ably supported in their work by the skill and commitment of the classroom assistants.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There is a very clear and coherent approach to the use of formative, summative and diagnostic forms of assessment throughout the school. The teaching and assessment co-ordinator and her team have worked diligently to introduce and oversee a number of initiatives over the last few years. A range of appropriate assessment for learning strategies have been embedded successfully in order to help the children become more independent at improving the quality of their own work and to support each other in their learning.

The children's work is marked regularly and in the best practice, particularly in literacy, the teachers mark and annotate the work with evaluative comments indicating how, if necessary, it could be improved.

The school uses a variety of standardised and non-standardised tests to assess the children's levels of achievement and set targets for aspects of literacy and numeracy. The progress of each child is very carefully tracked and monitored; the assessment outcomes are also used to good effect by individual teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their own practice and to inform their future planning and teaching.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school has a very inclusive and welcoming ethos for children with special educational needs. Thirty-one children have been identified as requiring help with their learning. The school uses the teachers' knowledge and experience, as well as a wide range of standardised tests, to identify early those children requiring additional help and provides appropriate and effective intervention to support them in both literacy and numeracy. This assistance is provided for the children through support in class, withdrawal sessions and team teaching.

The SENCO is systematic and effective in her work; she co-ordinates and monitors very effectively the additional learning needs of the children. She works diligently to liaise with, and support, the teachers, and they, in turn, take responsibility for the in-class implementation of individual education plans (IEPs). Pertinent IEPs featuring concise targets have been drawn up. The children's progress is monitored carefully and regularly, and the resultant information is used well to inform future IEPs.

The school receives beneficial multi-disciplinary support from those children requiring specialised help through, for example, the services of the Belfast Education and Library Board Peripatetic Service, St Gerard's Outreach Service, Barnardos and the Educational Psychology Service of the BELB.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for nine years and has shown strong commitment and dedication to the children's well-being and to school improvement. She has a clear vision for the school and provides very good leadership both in the administration of the school and the curricular leadership and support she provides for the staff. She fosters a team approach, and is ably supported by the Vice-principal with ongoing school developments. The Principal has built on the strengths of the staff and works with them to set realistically high expectations for the school and for the children. The co-ordinators have an important role in monitoring and evaluating the work in their areas of responsibility, and do so very effectively.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is an appropriate school development plan (SDP) which sets out clearly the priorities and guides the work of the school. The staff have prepared appropriate action plans, identified success criteria, and agreed and implemented clear strategies to monitor and evaluate progress. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP across the whole school community. The plan meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The school receives beneficial support from the Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS) of the Belfast Education and Library Board. Staff development is given a high priority and is linked to key priorities within the SDP. These priorities are reviewed regularly and staff development activities organised accordingly. Links are made between staff development undertaken and outcomes for teaching and learning in the classrooms. Teachers have attended a wide range of courses.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive and positive ethos throughout the school which promotes effectively the development of the children's thinking;
- the very high quality of the provision for pastoral care and the exemplary behaviour of the children;
- the high quality of the teaching observed, almost all being very good with one in six lessons judged to be of outstanding quality;
- the commitment, strategic vision and distributive leadership of the Principal;

- the effective role of the co-ordinators and their teams in implementing and embedding initiatives in order to improve and deepen learning and raise standards; and
- the very good standards in both literacy and numeracy achieved by the majority of the children.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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