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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**St Joseph's Primary School
Belfast**

Inspected: October 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Joseph's Primary School is situated in Ballyhackamore in East Belfast. Most of the children who attend the school come from the surrounding area. The enrolment has increased steadily over the last three years and stands currently at 189. Just over 2% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. Almost 20% of the children have English as an additional language.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents 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 children from year 6. Questionnaires were issued to all of the parents; 62% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 44 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicate strongly that the parents support and value highly the work of the school. They praised the dedication and the approachability of the staff and the care provided for the children. They highlighted the inclusive atmosphere in the school and its good standing in the local community. The governors expressed their appreciation of the work of the staff and their commitment to and support for the ongoing development of the school. The children spoke very positively about the many aspects of school that they enjoy and they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being. The Education and Training Inspectorate has communicated to the Principal and a representative of the governors the main points emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in English, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting learning and teaching in literacy, the provision for special educational needs (SEN) and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school provides a caring, orderly and supportive learning environment in which the children's contributions are valued. The children are welcoming to visitors and there is a strong inclusive ethos which promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect. The behaviour of the children is excellent, they show motivation and enjoyment in their learning and they are keen to talk about their work. The learning support staff make a valuable contribution to the children's learning and development.

2.2 The arrangements for pastoral care and child protection have important strengths. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are the quality of the working relationships at all levels throughout the school and the high quality of pastoral care provision. The areas for improvement include the need to consult further with the staff, children and parents when revising policies, and to update and review the training for staff and governors.

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has important strengths. Attention is paid to the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity programmes, for example water provision and the promotion of healthy breaks three days per week, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The few areas for improvement identified include the need to provide an assessment of the nature

and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school in the School Development Plan (SDP) to comply with statutory regulations, and to incorporate food-related health initiatives into a healthy eating policy.

2.4 Within the last year, the teachers have worked hard to prepare written medium-term planning to take account of changes in the curriculum. In the best practice, the planning sets out clearly the learning intentions in terms of key knowledge and skills, and differentiation by task and outcome, as appropriate.

2.5 The teachers are hard-working and there is a very strong sense of team work. The teaching observed was always satisfactory, in a majority of the lessons observed it was good or better and, on a few occasions, it was excellent. The teachers use a good variety of teaching approaches to develop the children's independence and thinking skills, including effective paired and group work. In the best practice observed, the children had a clear understanding of the intended learning and the teachers provided opportunities for the children to reflect and build upon their learning. On occasion, the activities lacked sufficient challenge.

2.6 At foundation stage (FS), the teachers create an attractive and stimulating learning environment which takes account of the children's needs, interests and stage of development. The teachers make good use of the available space, given the limitations of the building and the site, and the children experience a range of indoor and outdoor play activities. In the best practice, there is good interaction between the adults and the children to develop the children's thinking skills personal capabilities, and independence. This good practice should be disseminated, including the need to ensure that all of the teachers communicate effectively to the children what they are expected to learn and experience.

2.7 The overall planning for literacy is detailed and provides comprehensive guidance for the development of literacy across the year groups. The literacy coordinator supports her colleagues effectively and has led a recent review of the schemes of work for English. It is appropriate that the school has identified this as an ongoing area for development. In English, by the end of key stage (KS) 2, most of the children achieve very good to excellent standards in line with their abilities.

2.8 The teachers provide very good opportunities, both structured and informal, to promote talking and listening skills. The children display confidence and enthusiasm when talking with others, they work well in pairs and groups, sharing ideas and listening to the views and opinions of others.

2.9 The teachers, through the effective display of the children's work and by providing library corners and collections of topic-related books, have created a stimulating literacy environment within their rooms. The school's central library is well-stocked and the school has good links with the local library. The whole-school programme for reading is coherent and shows progression. The children in the FS display an interest in books and enjoy listening to stories and rhymes. The teachers in the FS make use of a range of early word recognition strategies to encourage the development of the children's early phonological awareness. There is a need for a more systematic and consistent approach to the development

and implementation of these strategies which caters for the expected progression in the children's knowledge and skills. At KS1 the children benefit from a variety of teaching approaches, including shared and guided reading activities and many of the children read with fluency and confidence. The children in KS 2 continue to develop their reading skills through the use of a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books.

2.10 There are many examples of independent writing of a very high standard in English and across the curriculum. Most of the children present their work well. The children in year 1 have opportunities to experiment with letter formation and the children in year 2 are beginning to show independence in their writing. At KS1 the children enjoy writing about their own experiences and at KS2 the children write in an appropriate variety of styles and are aware of different audiences.

2.11 The teachers have identified appropriate ICT tasks which will support learning and teaching in literacy and which promote independent and collaborative learning. It is timely that the school will participate this year in the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment KS2 Scheme of Information Technology Accreditation.

2.12 The quality of the work of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is excellent, and is a strong feature of the work of the school. Approximately 18% of the children are identified by the school as requiring additional support for their learning. The SENCO maintains detailed and appropriate records of the work completed and of the progress made by individual children. Liaison between the SENCO, the class teachers and the classroom assistants is well-planned and effective. The SENCO makes good use of the expertise of the class teachers, and employs a wide range of standardised and diagnostic tests to identify effectively those children who enter the SEN programme. In conjunction with the teacher who gives additional support for children who have English as an additional language, she uses a well-organised variety of methods to develop the children's mathematical and literacy abilities as appropriate. The children's needs are met in a caring environment with well-planned and challenging individualised programmes.

2.13 Data on the children's performance and attainment is collected and is used increasingly to track the progress of individual children, including helping identify any learning difficulties. The school maintains a folder for each child in which copies of annual progress reports and summative assessment records are retained. There are opportunities during the school year for the parents to meet with the teachers to discuss the progress made by their children.

2.14 The teachers mark the children's work regularly and often annotate the work with positive comments. There is a need to continue to develop a consistent marking for improvement strategy linked to the assessment for learning process, and to develop formative assessment arrangements.

2.15 There is a sound and developing culture of self-evaluation within the school and the Principal has played a key role in facilitating this. To develop further this culture, there is an important need to make more extensive use of school performance data, including data available on the children's attainment results in various standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, to review and inform further improvements in learning, and to improve further the already very good standards achieved by most of the children.

2.16 The Principal's effective leadership and management, and his continuing commitment to the stated vision of the school are evident in the work of the school. He is strongly supportive of the welfare of his staff, and focuses appropriately on meeting the children's pastoral and academic needs. With the recent appointment of a Vice-principal and accompanying changes in staffing, there has been some redefinition of roles and responsibilities. The school has identified appropriately the need to continue this redefinition and clarification including the need to develop and strengthen the roles of the various post holders and other members of staff in monitoring and evaluating the work within their curricular areas. The inspection findings endorse these as important priorities for the medium and longer term.

2.17 Much work has gone into the SDP which is comprehensive and sets out in useful detail an appropriate set of priorities. Importantly, and to comply with statutory requirements, the SDP should include a clear and succinct assessment of the children's progress and standards of attainment, the teaching and curricular provision, and the extent to which it has met or revised any previous key targets of progress.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the strong inclusive ethos which promotes an atmosphere of mutual respect;
- the high quality of the pastoral care provision;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in a majority of the lessons observed and, on a few occasions, excellent;
- the very good to excellent standards achieved by most of the children in line with their abilities;
- the excellent quality of the work of the SENCO and the effective provision for children who require additional support for their learning; and
- the effective leadership and management of the Principal and the sound and developing culture of self-evaluation within the school.

3.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is very good. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The parents can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation falls short of modern standards and restricts the opportunities to deliver aspects of the curriculum effectively.

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