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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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**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 Mary's Primary School
Cookstown**

Inspected: April 2008

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Mary's Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 07/04/2008**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 503-2699** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 1 Intake	22	30	22	23	23
Enrolments					
Primary	159	164	168	163	167
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0

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):

97%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 7 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 23.85 NI PTR: 20.8
- iii. Average Class Size: 23.85
- iv. Class Size (Range): 21 to 27
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|----|
| i. Clerical support: | 30 |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | 15 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 40 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.19%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 6.58%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 6.58%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Mary's primary school is situated in the foothills of the Sperrin mountains some eight miles from Cookstown, Co Tyrone. The school serves the immediate rural community; nearly all of the children travel to school by bus and car. The enrolment has increased over recent years to its current level of 167. Approximately 7% of the children are entitled to free school meals; 17 children receive additional support with aspects of their learning in English and mathematics.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and teachers 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. One hundred and five families were issued with questionnaires; approximately 39% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which thirteen contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires highlighted the wide range of extra-curricular activities, the caring and hard working teachers, the very effective leadership of the recently appointed Principal, and the high regard with which the school is held in the community. Most of the teachers completed an online questionnaire and provided additional written comments; their responses were wholly positive. The Chair of the governors commented favourably on the hardworking and dedicated staff and the positive impact of the Principal on the life and work of the school. The year 6 children talked with enthusiasm about how they enjoy school and the support they receive from their teachers. They reported that they feel very happy and secure in school and know where to seek help if they have a concern. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the Governors, any areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.3 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in mathematics, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting numeracy and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs (SEN) provision. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures in relation to pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school is characterised by a very caring and supportive ethos. The children are friendly and courteous; the overall standard of behaviour both in and out of class is excellent. The circulation areas have been enlivened with photographs, murals and examples of the children's work resulting in a stimulating and bright learning environment. The teachers make good use of the outside space, including a memorial garden to enhance the children's learning experiences. The quality of the classroom displays is of a very high standard; the displays are used effectively to support the children's understanding and learning across the curriculum. The support staff make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. The school is well maintained to high standards of cleanliness.

2.2 The school places strong emphasis on promoting the children's self-esteem and confidence; the children's efforts and achievements are acknowledged and celebrated through the school's awards programme and participation in whole school assemblies. Initiatives such as the 'Christmas around the world' show help to contribute to the celebration of diversity within the school. In addition, the children's learning, cultural and social development is enriched through educational visits, competitions, community events and by

visiting speakers to the school. An extensive after-school programme offers ICT, craft, music, drama, sporting and other learning opportunities for the children. The school raises significant funds to enhance the learning provision and to support local and international charities.

2.3 Parents are kept well-informed about the life and work of the school through regular newsletters. Information on individual children's progress is provided through the annual written report and by meetings with the class teacher during the year. In addition, the school has introduced a curriculum night which has strengthened further the home-school liaison. The school has good links with the community, including feeder pre-school settings and with the post-primary schools to which the children transfer.

2.4 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which fully implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had an opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school.

2.5 The strengths of the pastoral provision include:

- the positive learning environment created by the teachers and the support staff;
- the effective leadership of the designated and deputy designated teachers;
- the range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children;
- the well-planned and creative strategies to foster the children's personal development and mutual understanding; and
- the development of the playground friendship scheme to promote pastoral responsibility amongst the children.

2.6 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example the breakfast club, healthy breaks and school nurse visits to reinforce nutritional messages, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. Good opportunities are identified within the curriculum to promote the children's understanding of health and well-being.

2.7 The teachers are hard-working and are committed fully to the children and their learning. The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was always good, and, in a significant minority of the lessons, excellent. The teachers used a variety of imaginative teaching strategies, including effective group and paired work, individual activities and active learning approaches to engage and motivate the children.

2.8 The teachers plan thoroughly for their teaching. The diligent preparation of schemes of work and topics to meet the needs of the children provides for effective progression in the children's learning. The short-term planning for lessons including the two week planning cycle, identifies clearly the intended learning outcomes and is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. The teachers monitor the effectiveness of their teaching and use their evaluations to inform future planning.

2.9 The children settle quickly to their work; they participate purposefully and enthusiastically, and with sustained interest during class. They respond well and share equipment, take turns and respect one another's contributions readily. The children set about their learning conscientiously and the standard of presentation of work is consistently high across the year groups.

2.10 The teaching of mathematics is a major strength within the school. The school has been participating in the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy (NINS) with the support of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB). Through their involvement in the NINS, the teachers have gained significantly in terms of professional development and are implementing well the new teaching approaches they have acquired. Under the direction of the very effective numeracy co-ordinator, the scheme of work is both comprehensive and systematic and provides appropriate guidance for the teachers to plan effectively across the mathematics curriculum. The staff have welcomed and appreciated the support provided by the SELB's Curriculum Advisory and Support services in the development of mathematics within the school.

2.11 In all classes, the mathematics lessons are planned well and incorporate a range of teaching approaches, practical activities and discussion sessions; a very good range of resources is used creatively to support the learning and teaching. All of the mathematics lessons include sessions of mental mathematics in which the children respond well to a variety of interesting and, at times, stimulating and challenging activities. A significant feature of the children's mathematical experiences is the extent to which opportunities are provided for the children to apply their mathematical thinking in other areas of the curriculum.

2.12 In the early years classes, the children gain a good understanding of number and basic number operations, simple measurement, common two and three dimensional shapes and are given opportunities to present their work in pictorial and graphical form. Much of this work is linked well to the children's everyday experiences. By the end of KS1, the children have a good level of understanding of number, shape and space. As they progress through KS2, the children's learning is developed further, and by year 7 they have gained a broad range of mathematical knowledge and skills; most have an understanding of number, fractions and place value, are able to calculate accurately, recognise and know the properties of two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes, estimate and measure in different units, and interpret and present data in a variety of forms. The teachers use skilful questioning techniques that allow the children to think and talk critically and confidently about their mathematical learning.

2.13 By the end of KS2, the children achieve standards commensurate with their abilities and for the majority of them the standards are good.

2.14 The teachers make effective use of ICT to support numeracy. Aspects of number, shape and measurement are consolidated regularly with appropriate programmes, and programmable devices such as ‘Beebot’ and ‘Roamer’; simple Logo programmes help develop the children’s understanding of direction, scale and control. Data-handling packages are used well to assist the children to collect, analyse and present data in a variety of forms; appropriately, the data used is related to the children’s experiences and interests. The three recently acquired interactive whiteboards are used well to support the children’s learning and the teachers continue to enhance their confidence and competence in their use. There is good use of ICT resources including the mobile laptop computers to provide extension and challenge for the children as independent learners.

2.15 The school has identified seventeen children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The provision for SEN is given high priority on the School Development Plan (SDP) and a comprehensive policy guides the SEN programme. The recently appointed Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is well organised and has a clear commitment to the continuous development of the SEN provision within the school. She is very effective in the use of a range of monitoring and evaluation strategies to promote improvement.

2.16 Individual education plans are maintained and identify relevant strategies and targets for improvement. The teachers provide appropriately differentiated activities which take account of the range of abilities within the class. Much of the support is provided within the class setting; schemes such as ‘Catch Up’, ‘Mist’ and ‘Quest’ have provided effective remediation support and when required, the school makes good use of external agencies to support the children and the teachers. During the inspection, the classroom assistants provided well-directed learning support to individual children in a sensitive manner.

2.17 The teachers mark the children’s written work conscientiously and with rigour, often with supportive and encouraging comments. In the best practice the quality of marking is very good, the teachers’ written comments commend effort and provide helpful suggestions on how the work might be improved. The school is developing further its assessment procedures by placing greater focus on the children’s own evaluations of their learning, and by making greater use of the quantitative data from informal and formal tests; this is an appropriate development which will allow the school to evaluate more fully the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 The recently appointed Principal has been in post for eight months; she is conscientious, dedicated and provides highly effective leadership. During this period she has introduced successfully a number of curricular and pastoral initiatives which have impacted positively on the work and life of the school. She inspires confidence and has a clear strategic vision for the school which she communicates well to the children, staff, parents, governors and the local community. She sets a positive tone throughout the school and her

consultative and collaborative approach to school development work has brought a fresh impetus to the development of a more collegiate approach throughout the school. She sets high expectations with respect to learning and teaching and combines her roles well as a teaching Principal.

3.2 Roles and responsibilities within the school are clearly defined and there is a high level of skill and commitment among the staff which enables them to lead and manage their areas of responsibility well. Staff development needs are well met through carefully selected in-service training which is closely matched to the needs and priorities of the school as identified in the SDP.

3.3 In consultation with the staff, the school has recently prepared a revised SDP which sets out clear and appropriate priorities for improvement. These priorities are underpinned by detailed action plans and whole-school targets to improve learning and teaching including literacy and numeracy. The school is working towards meeting fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the caring and supportive ethos throughout the school;
- the exemplary behaviour exhibited by the children and their very positive attitude to learning;
- the quality of the teaching which was consistently good and in a significant minority of the lessons observed, was excellent;
- the good quality of provision in mathematics and in particular, the strong focus on mental processes in developing the children's thinking skills;
- the support for, and commitment to, meeting the needs of the children who require additional learning support; and
- the highly effective leadership of the Principal and her collegiate and collaborative approach to school development work.

4.2 In the areas inspected, the school has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The parents and local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-inspection is required.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a serious lack of appropriate administration space.
- There is no secured access to the temporary mobile classroom within the school grounds.
- The location of the main school entrance gate beside a busy main road contributes to potentially dangerous traffic conditions outside the school.

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