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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 Patrick's Primary School
Gortin, Omagh**

Inspected: November 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 St Patrick's Primary School is situated in Gortin, Co Tyrone. Approximately half the children come from the village and the remainder travel by bus from the surrounding area. The enrolment has ranged from 106 to 80 over the last five years and is currently 81. Approximately 11% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. The school has identified 17% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

FOCUS

1.2 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English and literacy, and mathematics and numeracy, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting the learning in these two areas. The school's arrangements for pastoral care including child protection were also evaluated; the school was selected to monitor the implementation of the healthy food in schools initiative.

THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

1.3 The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to inspection as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), a group of year 6 children and a group of year 7 children. Forty-eight questionnaires were issued to parents; 14% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and three contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents appreciate the welcoming atmosphere in the school, are satisfied that their children feel safe and secure in school and feel that the school is well thought of in the community. The Principal and the governors have already begun to address the small number of issues raised through the written comments.

Almost all of the teaching staff responded to the online questionnaire; the responses were wholly positive and indicate that the teachers regard highly the celebration of the children's achievements and appreciate the promotion of links with the parents and local community. The governors expressed appreciation of their involvement in the life and work of the school, the hard work of the staff, the efforts made to raise the self-esteem of the children and the contribution the school makes to the local community. The children spoke very favourably about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel happy and secure, and indicated that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

PASTORAL CARE

1.4 A strong family ethos permeates the work and life of the school; children are at the centre of all the school's activities and a children's council has been established to involve them more formally in decision-making. Working relationships at all levels are very good; there is a strong emphasis on respect and mutual understanding and the promotion of positive behaviour throughout the school. A wide range of sporting and other extra-curricular activities is provided for the children. The Irish language and culture are given a high priority across a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

CHILD PROTECTION

1.5 The arrangements for child protection in the school are very good. The school provides a secure learning environment for the children in which they feel valued and at ease. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars. The governors, staff and parents are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to the range of effective policies on child protection. The school recognises the need to review the procedures in place for the supervision of the children from Foundation Stage (FS) as they leave the school at the end of the day.

HEALTHY EATING/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

1.6 The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. It has been awarded health promoting school status and senior prefects encourage and praise healthy breaks and lunchboxes which, in turn, promote healthy lifestyle messages.

LINKS WITH PARENTS

1.7 The quality of the communication with parents is very good. The school has a website with all the key documents and information; the site is well maintained and regularly updated. A regular newsletter, which is also available on the website, gives details of upcoming events and activities, and celebrates the achievements of the children in various activities. Parents are encouraged and supported to become involved in their children's education and in the general work and life of the school; annual meetings and annual written reports keep parents informed of their children's progress.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

LEARNING

2.1 The school is appropriately reviewing literacy and mathematics provision including schemes of work, learning strategies, resources and planning in line with the implementation of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The children are motivated and involved in the learning process; the children interact confidently with the teachers and there are frequent opportunities for questioning and discussion. By the end of key stage (KS) 2 the children are able to work collaboratively in groups and complete tasks co-operatively. Children are given opportunities in class and during recreational time to develop independence, take responsibility and develop self-management skills.

ENGLISH AND LITERACY

2.2 The provision for English and literacy in the school has many strengths. By year 7 standards in English are very good, with a majority of the children achieving standards that are in line with their age and level of ability.

2.3 Throughout the school there are very good opportunities for the children to develop talking and listening skills. In the lessons observed the children were confident and articulate in asking questions and engaging the teacher in discussion. Participation in daily assembly

and community events such as the local Feis provides a wider audience for the children. In the FS children are encouraged to develop oral skills through active learning; the teacher provides high quality interaction with the children across a range of imaginative activities to promote language and vocabulary. In KS1 and 2 the children's talking and listening skills are developed through interactive lessons with opportunities for children to work in groups, negotiating roles and responsibilities, sharing ideas, reaching conclusions and justifying decisions.

2.4 The school provides a literacy-rich environment for the children with inviting library areas in most of the classrooms and informative and imaginative displays in the classrooms and shared amenity areas. The use of interactive whiteboards greatly enhances the children's exposure to a range of contextual reading opportunities. Reading is taught systematically throughout the school using modelled, shared and guided strategies; staff have made a good start to incorporating Reading Recovery methods and the recent introduction and appropriate use of a phonics programme is having a positive impact on the children's phonological awareness. In the FS and KS1 reading is taught using banded Reading Recovery resources alongside a commercial scheme matched to the needs of the children. Recognition of key words is appropriately developed and progress in reading is carefully monitored. In KS2 the commercial scheme is complemented by the use of appropriate novels. The children talk enthusiastically and knowledgably about reading preferences, and demonstrate positive reading habits. Attitudes to reading are further enhanced through a peer reading programme whereby KS2 children read to or listen to KS1 children on a weekly basis. The school monitors reading standards and has provision in place for those children who require additional support.

2.5 The school has prioritised the development of writing across the curriculum and has a systematic plan in place to raise writing standards; the effectiveness of a new spelling scheme is being carefully monitored. At FS, KS1 and KS2 the children write in a range of genres using shared, guided and modelled writing. In the FS the children are provided with opportunities for emergent writing through play activities and more formal opportunities are provided at the appropriate stage of development. The children's independence is encouraged through the use of 'have a go' books, accessibility to a range of dictionaries and through the use of study buddies. Children are able to transfer writing skills across the curriculum and are provided with opportunities to write in meaningful everyday contexts such as writing letters to pen friends. During the inspection the children in the FS, KS1 and KS2 were exploring poetry as a means of expression. By year 7 the standards in writing are very good; the children are producing imaginative and creative pieces of work; presentation is generally good.

MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

2.6 There are many strengths in the school's mathematics provision. By year 7 most of the children are attaining standards in mathematics that are in line with their age and ability levels. Expectations are high; the children are challenged to extend their learning and appropriate support is provided when some children are experiencing difficulties.

2.7 In the FS, much of the work is appropriately linked to the children's everyday experiences and is activity based. The very good quality of the interaction between the staff and the children across a range of imaginative activities promotes the children's early mathematical language. Concepts are introduced in line with the children's age and ability;

for example, the children used a number line made of autumn leaves to investigate number relationships incorporating appropriate prepositional language and the children were observed investigating patterns using buttons, shells and lollipop sticks with differentiated responses appropriate to the children's stage of development.

2.8 There is a wide range of mathematical resources available and good use is made of these resources to promote the children's interest in their work. In one KS1 session observed, 'feely bags' containing 2-dimensional (2D) and 3D shapes were used to encourage the children to talk about the properties of various shapes. Some of the work observed, however, was not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all the children; there is also a need to further embed thinking time to promote accuracy in the children's responses. Most of the younger children achieve good results in the end of KS1 assessments.

2.9 As the children progress through KS2, the teachers use pair and group work appropriately to promote the children's learning in mathematics; effective questioning techniques challenge the children's thinking skills and extend their learning. By the end of KS2, the children demonstrate good ability in number, measures, shape and space, data-handling and processes. They are able to discuss their mathematical thinking with confidence and can explain how mathematics can be used in other areas of the curriculum.

2.10 The school makes appropriate use of ICT to support learning and teaching in mathematics; good use is made of the school's two interactive whiteboards. In KS2 a trip to Gortin Glen to undertake practical and investigative mathematics is being used by the teachers as a context for developing and extending the children's oracy and literacy skills through the preparation of PowerPoint presentations.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

PLANNING

3.1 The teachers prepare their work diligently and are guided by a range of good quality policies and schemes which underpin the teachers' individual planners; the staff have recently reviewed planning and have produced appropriately detailed and differentiated long- and medium-term planners which address all aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Planners include imaginative ways of threading curricular strands through the main subjects and a good start has been made to thematic and topic based planning. Planners identify appropriate learning outcomes and include differentiation to take account of individual ability and composite age groups.

TEACHING

3.2 In all classes teaching is within the context of composite classes. During the inspection the quality of most of the teaching observed was good or better, and in a majority of lessons was very good or outstanding. A small number of lessons had significant weaknesses. Where the teaching was good or better, the teachers shared the learning intentions and success criteria with the children; classroom management was good, there was effective questioning to promote thinking skills and teachers maintained the children's interest in the activities throughout the lesson. Effective plenary sessions provided the children with an opportunity to talk about their learning and afforded teachers an opportunity to assess understanding. In the less effective practice observed, children were unsettled and

inattentive, and learning opportunities were missed. In almost all the lessons observed, resources were selected and used appropriately in line with the children's stage of development.

ASSESSMENT

3.3 The school has prioritised Assessment for Learning as an area for development and the teachers have availed of appropriate staff development including a cluster arrangement with another local primary school. Within individual classes teachers focus attention on learning intentions and a good start has been made to incorporating children's interests through the use of planning boards. All the teachers mark the children's work regularly; in the most effective practice feedback informs the children of how they have achieved the learning outcome and indicates areas for future improvement. In the FS direct observation is used to inform future planning with regard to the needs of individual children. Throughout the school the teachers use standardised and class tests to assess the children's level of achievement; end of topic evaluations and pupil assessments are appropriately focused and used to track progress in achievement and inform future planning at all levels. Individual profiles of children's achievement are maintained as an effective means of tracking pupil progress.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

3.4 The provision for special educational needs is very good and is underpinned by a useful Special Needs Policy. The school has a strong sense of inclusion where every child is valued as an individual. Children are identified and monitored at an early age through teacher observations, and later using class tests, standardised tests and end of topic assessments. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are prepared by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in consultation with the class teacher and the children; appropriate targets are set within a realistic time frame. Parents are consulted and informed of progress regularly. Appropriate teacher support is provided for the children with additional needs, both within class and in small withdrawal groups. External agencies are sourced and provide in-school support to the children or guidance for the teachers. Currently the support is focused mainly on literacy.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

4.1 The Principal has been in her present post since September 2007 and provides very good leadership and management. Over the past year she has worked hard to review, plan and implement significant change in the school's pastoral and curricular provision. She has engendered a sense of collegiality in the school and is ably supported by the class teachers and the ancillary staff; there is a culture of capacity building within the school with teachers taking responsibility for new curricular areas and availing of professional development. The Principal has taken a positive and imaginative approach to the implementation of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and has provided an appropriate strategic plan for the development of the school. As a class teacher, she provides an outstanding role-model for the staff and has high expectations for the children.

4.2 The co-ordinators have been appointed recently; all have made a considerable contribution to school development and the implementation of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. In particular the co-ordinators have made a very good start to the review and audit of their particular subject area and have put in place new strategies and procedures for the evaluation and monitoring of the children's learning. It will be important that the good start made to school improvement is sustained, embedded and developed in the coming years.

PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

4.3 The school gives very good attention and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Detailed associated action plans provide information on school improvement and are evaluated mid-year and at the end of the year. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the School Development Plan (SDP) within the school community. There is efficient and effective use of data analysis; the school has made significant improvements in standards in 2007/08 and set appropriate realistic targets for further improvement. Staff are consulted about professional development needs and this is linked directly to the SDP.

RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

4.4 The Board of Governors take an active role in the life of the school including consultation on school improvement, management of finance and expertise in enhancing pastoral provision. The governors are cognisant of the variable enrolment pattern and have addressed this issue through careful financial management. The school is well resourced; arrangements have been put in place to buy two further interactive whiteboards and the outdoor facilities are to be upgraded to provide appropriate physical play for the children. The aging building is maintained by the school caretaker to a high standard. The classrooms are small but the teachers make good use of the space available.

4.5 It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive child-centred ethos which permeates the life and work of the school;
- the high quality of the planning and teaching and the good start made to the development of a culture of self-evaluation;
- the very good standards achieved by the majority of the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the very good quality of the provision for children with special education needs;
- the very good leadership and management provided by the Principal; and

- the support of the parents and the local community, and the active involvement of the Board of Governors in the life and work of the school.

In the areas inspected, the quality of the 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.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY

ACCOMMODATION

- There is no glass in two of the classroom doors denying visual access from the corridor.

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