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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*



*Providing Inspection Services for*  
Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

**St Paul's Primary School  
Belfast**

**Inspected: October 2009**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	3
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	5
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	7
5.	CONCLUSION	7



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Paul's Primary School is situated in the Beechmount area of west Belfast. The enrolment in the primary school has decreased slightly over the past four years and currently stands at 242 children. Almost 11% of the children have English as an additional language (EAL). At the time of the inspection, 40% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and approximately 30% of the children were identified as having special educational needs.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

The inspection includes an evaluation of the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning. In addition, the use of ICT to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires 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 twenty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents; 38% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 17 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents appreciate the very welcoming Principal, the professional and approachable staff and the range of work and experiences provided for their children in school. The very small number of issues arising from the parental questionnaires were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors spoke positively about the strong sense of collegiality and the very welcoming ethos within the school. They praised the commitment of the recently appointed Principal and the staff's hard work and dedication in the interests of the children and the wider community.

All the teaching staff and 7 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. The responses were almost all positive and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school.

The year 6 children spoke with confidence about what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well being and reported that the teaching and support staff are always approachable and caring.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. An inclusive, caring and supportive ethos is evident throughout the school. All staff are committed to the welfare of the children and work together to promote and maintain an orderly and supportive environment for learning. A whole school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour encourages the children to work hard and develops their self-esteem and confidence. The children's work and achievements are celebrated in the bright and attractive displays in the classrooms and corridors throughout the school. They respond well to the staff's expectations for good behaviour; they are well-mannered, friendly and courteous, and their behaviour is exemplary.

The children's learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school. In addition, their learning experiences are further enriched through their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities including music, drama and sports.

The 'prefect system' and the playground 'buddy system' ensure the children make a valuable input to the life and work of the school. Their views and opinions on a range of issues are sought and valued. A counsellor, employed by Barnardo's, and sourced through the Full Service Community Network Counselling Project (FSCN), offers support to children experiencing emotional difficulties. The school also has access to a dedicated worker from the Diversity Service for EAL children and their families.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, healthy school meals and a successful breakfast club promotion, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The staff encourage participation in a wide range of sports and the children make effective use of any equipment in the playground.

#### 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school encourages and enjoys the strong support of the parents. A Parents' Group has been set up in partnership with Harmony Primary School in Belfast. Various other courses for parents, for example, the Incredible Years Programme for year 1 parents, are run regularly, and each month, the parents are invited to class assemblies; attendance is very good. A very comfortable and attractive family room has been refurbished recently through funding available from the FSCN and is available for courses, classes and as a formal and informal meeting room for parents. Communication between school and home is clear and helps the parents to understand more about the school. The staff organise a range of curriculum meetings and workshops to provide the parents with information about the work their children are doing in school and to develop the skills they need to support their children's learning. Valuable information about the school is available through the school's website. During the inspection, and as part of the whole school drive to promote writing, the staff organised a very successful and well-attended parents' workshop evening with a local author.

The school also benefits from a range of links and services through the FSCN, including family support services and transition workers who support links between St Paul's Primary School and other schools. The school contributes to selected charities and appropriate emphasis is placed on caring for others in both the local and the wider communities.

The Extended Schools initiative offers a successful homework club, as well as a range of sporting, cookery, art and drama activities. The school is linked with Harberton Special School in Belfast as part of the Schools' Community Relations Programme.

The school has just completed a very successful science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) project, which involved close curricular links with Corpus Christi College and St Dominic's High School, and culminated in the development of an environmental garden.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

### **2.1 LEARNING**

Almost all the children are highly motivated and demonstrate good levels of perseverance in their work. They have positive attitudes to learning and show enjoyment in their achievements. In the best practice, the children work collaboratively and take account of the opinions and views of others.

It is appropriate that the staff have planned to review the school's policy on learning and teaching through play in the early years. The play experiences need to be of higher quality in order to provide adequate challenge and progress from the foundation stage (FS) and throughout key stage (KS) 1.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average. When compared with schools in a similar free schools meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are below the average. The school's internal information indicates that, when comparing the children's standardised scores in English and mathematics with the Non-reading Intelligence Test, the majority of the children are performing at a level commensurate with their abilities.

### **2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY**

The quality of the provision in English and literacy is satisfactory. The staff have completed recently a detailed analysis of internal performance information; they have identified key aspects of literacy which need to be developed systematically to raise the children's attainment. This includes the development of the children's knowledge and understanding of the forms of writing across all areas of learning, reading comprehension skills and the children's talking and listening skills. The inspection findings concur with these identified areas for improvement.

The teachers plan conscientiously for English. In the best practice, they reflect upon the quality of the children's learning and use their evaluations to inform future planning. The teachers would benefit from further opportunities for collaborative planning for English across key stages in order to promote greater consistency and progression in the children's learning experiences.

From year 1, the children are encouraged and supported effectively by teachers to listen closely to others and to give oral responses during lessons. By the end of KS1, they contribute confidently to class discussions. The majority of teaching in KS1 and KS2 provides a good range of opportunities for children to develop their talking and listening skills, such as paired and small group work, circle time and formal presentations. It is important that this good practice is disseminated.

The children enjoy reading. In the FS, the teachers use a range of banded reading schemes and shared reading books. In addition, a new phonics programme has been introduced this year to provide a consistent approach to the development of the children's word-recognition skills. In KS1 and KS2, reading is further developed through regular shared and guided reading sessions, and related reading activities. In a majority of classes, the guided reading sessions are used effectively to enrich the children's language, to deepen their understanding of text and to promote the development of thinking skills. In addition, the reading related tasks are appropriately challenging and provide opportunities for the children to work together collaboratively. Where teaching is less effective, the reading tasks are not always in line with the children's levels of ability. There is a need for the staff to ensure that all of the children engage in a greater variety of challenging reading activities. By the end of KS2, the majority of children read with fluency and a satisfactory understanding of the text, commensurate with their ability.

The school's identified area for improvement is writing as evident in the 'Write on St Paul's' project which is a whole school approach to improving standards in writing. In the FS and KS1, the children engage appropriately with print and have good opportunities for shared writing activities such as class stories. As their skills develop, the children, through teacher-modelled, shared and guided writing sessions, begin to record their own ideas in simple words and sentences, and then in extended passages of prose. Throughout KS2, the children's writing is developed further and applied to a wider range of purposes, including, for example, recounts, narratives, extended creative writing and note-making through internet and book research activities. The children use effectively dictionaries and thesauri to support independent writing. During the inspection in the KS2 classes, the children produced good examples of empathetic writing as part of historical research activities. The school's computer suite provides valuable opportunities for the children to enhance their reading, writing and design skills. The children enjoy ICT activities and there are good examples of writing and pictorial displays created using ICT. While the current focus on implementing key aspects of assessment for learning, such as the use of learning intentions and success criteria, is beginning to impact positively on the quality of writing, there is a need for a more consistent implementation of elements such as marking for improvement, self and peer assessment.

### 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the provision in mathematics is good. The newly appointed co-ordinator leads the monitoring and evaluation of the children's mathematical learning through, for example, a regular review of teaching plans and analysis of assessment data. There is a need to broaden these procedures in order to more effectively evaluate the children's learning.

The school has identified the need to review the whole school programme for mathematics in order to provide more appropriate guidance for the staff in the creation of their medium and short term planning and so ensure greater continuity and progression in the children's learning.

Throughout the school, the children are given suitable opportunities to develop their mathematical knowledge and understanding through a range of experiences, including the use of practical equipment and opportunities to work in pairs and groups. In the best practice, they are encouraged to articulate their thinking processes and develop a range of appropriate strategies to aid quick mental calculations. These activities are appropriately challenging and well paced, children's errors are valued as learning opportunities and teachers use effective questioning to challenge and extend the children's thinking. By the end of KS1, the children demonstrate a good knowledge of important mathematical concepts, for example, place value and multiplication facts. However, the KS1 children need to have more opportunities to develop greater flexibility in their mathematical thinking and their understanding of measure. Throughout all key stages, the teachers need to reflect further on their practice to ensure that their expectations of the standards which the children can achieve in mathematics are sufficiently high for all learners.

Information and communication technology is used effectively, with teachers making good use of computer programmes, programmable devices and websites to support learning and teaching in mathematics. The year 7 children have successfully participated in the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ICT Accreditation scheme.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers prepare long, medium and short term planning, often using topic webs, to guide their day-to-day work with the children. In the best practice, this written planning ensures progression and identifies appropriately the intended learning, the teaching strategies to be used, and differentiation by task and outcome. There is a need to ensure that the planning for learning across all classes addresses the needs of all the children, including differentiation for the more able as well as the less able children.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

During the inspection, the quality of the majority of the teaching was good or better, and a small number of the lessons observed were outstanding. In the best practice, the teachers had high expectations of what the children could achieve and the work was well paced and matched closely to the needs and abilities of the children within the class. The intended learning was discussed at the beginning of the lessons, and at the end, there was review and consolidation of the learning. A suitable variety of teaching strategies was employed effectively and opportunities were provided for the children to work independently or in small groups. The teachers used skilful questioning that developed the children's ability to give extended responses. It is important that this very good practice is disseminated further to ensure appropriate challenge and progression for all the children.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and, in some classes provide prompt oral feedback to improve learning. In the best practice, effective marking promotes improvement and the children are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation of their learning. The school has identified appropriately in the current school development plan the need to improve marking and assessment for learning.



The school uses a range of standardised and non-standardised testing to assess the children's level of achievement in English and mathematics. Recently, the staff have introduced an effective Classroom 2000 computer program to track the children's progress and to identify and target underachievement. They have just begun to use effectively this assessment information to plan for the continued raising of standards.

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents well informed about their children's progress, for example, written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and an open-door policy for informal consultations. The annual written reports provides detailed information about progress in learning.

### **3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is very good. The recently appointed special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is reviewing the action plan for SEN, and has developed with the staff a comprehensive policy to guide the work in SEN. The school gives a high priority to those children who require support with their learning and allocates a substantial resource to improving the children's learning. There is a very inclusive and welcoming ethos for children with additional needs in the school; the children are identified at an early stage through the use of diagnostic tests and teachers' observations. Parents are kept well informed at all stages.

Appropriate intervention is planned to support the children in literacy. This assistance is provided through support in class, but also includes regular withdrawal sessions by the part-time SEN teacher and by the Vice-principal. The quality of the extra support is very good and is linked effectively to the children's work in class through careful and regular liaison with the class teachers. The commitment of the staff to providing effective support is evident in that each week the Principal facilitates the class teachers to work for one session with the groups of children in their classes who have additional needs.

The teachers take responsibility for the in-class implementation of individual education plans (IEPs). The targets in the IEPs are specific, reviewed regularly and are a useful support to classroom practice.

The school receives beneficial multi-disciplinary support for those children requiring specialised help through, for example, the services of the Belfast Education and Library Board Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, St Gerard's Resource Centre and other agencies to support learning and teaching.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The Principal has been in post for just over one year and provides outstanding leadership. He has a clear vision for the school and fosters a team approach to ongoing school development. In his relatively short time in post, he has engendered a strong sense of collegiality among all the staff. He is ably-supported by the Vice-principal, the dedicated teachers and the hard-working support staff. Several co-ordinators have been appointed recently, for example, the SENCO, numeracy and ICT co-ordinators.

## 4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) is appropriate and sets out clearly the school's priorities. It is based on clear evidence about raising attainment for the children. Several action plans have been devised; the plans need to identify in greater detail the steps to be taken to achieve the outlined targets. The school has identified the need for more detailed action planning in order to ensure consistency and rigour in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the children's learning experiences. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP across the whole school community. The school gives very good attention to, and meets fully, the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

## 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. They support whole-heartedly the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP. With advice from the Principal and the school's management team, the governors have managed effectively the financial needs of the school.

## 4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school building was built in the 1960s and is in need of modernisation. The standard of caretaking is very good. The ICT suite and the central library enhance the learning environment. Currently, a technician, employed through the Steps to Work programme provided by the Department of Employment and Learning, has provided support in ICT for the children, the teachers and the parents.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care provision for the children;  
the outstanding quality of the leadership of the Principal, ably supported by the Vice-principal and teachers and support staff;
- the whole-school focus on inclusion, evidenced through the high quality of the support for children with special educational needs;
- the quality of the teaching, the majority of which ranged from good to outstanding;
- the effective analysis of assessment data used to set the strategic direction for improvement, linked to a comprehensive school development plan; and
- the strong support and involvement of the governors in the work of the school and the many, very effective links with the local community.

5.2 The area for improvement includes the need to:

- focus the planning to ensure appropriate challenge and progress for all children in order to raise the standards the children achieve in literacy and numeracy.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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