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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Good Shepherd Primary School is situated on the outskirts of West Belfast and draws most of its children from the Poleglass area. The enrolment, presently 394 children, has decreased substantially in recent years. Just under 65% of the children are entitled to free school meals, and the school identifies approximately 29% of the children as having special educational needs (SEN).

1.2 As part of the arrangements for pastoral care, parents were invited to complete confidential questionnaires. Of the 105 questionnaires issued, 52 were completed and returned to the Department of Education (DE); thirty of the questionnaires included extended written comments. During the inspection, the inspectors met with representatives of the Board of Governors (BoG). The parents and the governors were strongly supportive of the work of the school and commented, particularly, on the caring ethos, the very good quality of pastoral care, the high esteem in which the school is held in the local community, and the hard-working and conscientious staff. The few matters raised were discussed with the Principal. The inspectors had a discussion with a group of the year 6 children. The children indicated that they knew whom to turn to for advice, were happy in the school and familiar with daily routines. The inspection findings endorse the favourable comments made by the governors, the parents and the children, particularly the excellent quality of the pastoral care provided.

1.3 The inspection focused on English, information and communication technology (ICT) and pastoral care, including the arrangements for child protection.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK**

2.1 A caring, well-ordered and supportive ethos permeates the life and work of the school. There is a strong sense of a school identity. Working relationships at all levels are very good, and there is a clear sense of mutual respect within which the children are clearly valued as individuals. There is a strong sense of team-work and the non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution. The teachers are hard-working, committed to the children, and value clearly their work.

2.2 The children's behaviour is very good; they respond well to their teachers, co-operate well with one another, and are most welcoming to visitors. The foyer area, corridors and classrooms are bright and cheerful, with attractive displays of the children's recent work, including work in art and design, English and photographic records of recent events in school life.

2.3 The quality of pastoral care is excellent. There is a strong and appropriate emphasis on meeting the children's individual pastoral needs. In particular, the school promotes well the personal and social development of the children in its care. Under the able leadership of the designated teacher for child protection, pastoral support for individual children is based well on a good knowledge of their needs and home circumstances. The designated teacher has received appropriate training and she, in turn, has ensured the provision of training for all staff, including the ancillary staff. She has worked hard, and over a long period of time, to establish multi-disciplinary links with the diverse range of agencies involved with the school. The school's pastoral programme complements well a positive approach to discipline, which includes an effectively operated merit system. All of the teachers operate a variety of well-

planned reward systems to motivate the children, to acknowledge their efforts, and to reward their achievements. There is clear evidence of these strategies having a very positive impact on the children's motivation and attitude in class. Assemblies are planned well and often include the active participation of the children. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the DE Circular 1999/10, "Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection" and in Circular 2003/13, "The Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order".

2.4 The school's in-house and extra-curricular activities include a range of sporting and musical activities which the children enjoy and benefit from. Considerable attention is devoted to developing activities which promote well the children's understanding of their gaelic culture, including musical and sporting activities. The school engages in a range of charity work, reflecting again the commitment of both the staff and children. There is a well-developed Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) link with another primary school.

2.5 The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was always satisfactory; in a significant minority of the lessons, it was good. In the best practice observed, the teacher communicated clearly the expected learning outcomes for lessons, and, through effective oral discussion with the class, subsequently evaluated whether the learning outcomes were met. The teaching approaches used often challenged the children to think for themselves, in tasks which were matched well to their own ability. In a significant minority of classes, however, the expected learning outcomes set for and achieved by the children need to be higher; this includes the more able children as well as those who have learning difficulties. This is a key area for improvement. The children generally need more frequent opportunities to discuss and to share ideas with their peers, within small groups, and with the whole class as appropriate. In addition, the good practice seen needs to be disseminated to all the classes. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly. In the best practice, the work is marked with supportive and helpful comments, which often allow the children to improve aspects of their performance.

2.6 The children have regular opportunities to take part in structured play sessions; they settle quietly, co-operate in small groups, interact effectively, and develop important social skills through the wide range of play activities available. The teachers and classroom assistants interact sensitively with the children, and encourage them to talk about what they are doing. While the play activities contribute to the children's learning and language development, there needs to be a stronger focus on the achievement of the learning outcomes expected to ensure adequate progression in the development of the children's skills. The school has included structured play in the development plan for the next school year and the inspection findings endorse this as an appropriate priority. The whole-school planning for structured play needs to define better the learning, continuity and progression expected in the children's play experiences.

2.7 There are important strengths in English and three important areas for improvement. The written guidance for English is generally sound. Talking and listening are regular features, both within the programme for English, and throughout the curriculum. The quality and range of work in talking and listening ranges from generally sound to sometimes excellent. The majority of the teachers provide a good range of opportunities to promote the children's talking and listening skills. The children generally are competent in responding to the teachers' questions. When given the opportunity, they use well any opportunities provided to engage in extended discussion; this good practice needs to be more widespread.

2.8 In key stage (KS) 1, the children learn to read using a variety of commercial and supplementary resources. In KS2, they continue to develop their reading skills through the study of novels and other commercial materials. The inspection findings confirm that the use of new reading resources, including those produced by the teachers themselves, is having a positive impact on the children's quality of experiences. In the best practice seen, in about one-third of the classes, the teaching of reading was thorough and the work was organised well to take account of the wide range of abilities present. There is, however, a significant minority of children throughout the school who have problems with reading and this is a key issue that needs to be addressed more effectively. In general, a much sharper focus is required on improving the standards that the children achieve in reading. The staff have identified the need to develop further strategies for a more systematic approach to the teaching of reading, including a judicious use of phonics where appropriate. The school is considering arranging opportunities for all the teachers, with the support of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) Curriculum, Advisory and Support Service (CASS) if possible, to observe for themselves additional strategies for the teaching of reading.

2.9 The children present their written work neatly. The range and balance of their independent writing is, however, variable. In a significant minority of classes, the record of the children's workbooks, and the classroom displays, show many examples of vibrant, thoughtful writing. In these classes, the children have many opportunities to choose appropriate language to express their ideas and emotions. In the best practice seen, for example in a year 7 class, the children completed a range of writing tasks in a variety of contexts and for a range of audiences. In general, however, more opportunities are needed for independent writing in English itself and across the curriculum. In a majority of the KS2 classes, and in a few KS1 classes, there is an overemphasis on the completion of comprehension exercises linked to commercial schemes which do not challenge the children sufficiently. A significant minority of the children are capable of an earlier start to independent writing in the early years.

2.10 The teachers have prepared a policy on the use of ICT and make use of guidance developed by the Education and Library Boards to help them integrate ICT in their teaching. The planning outlines the expected ICT experiences for the children in each year group, and is supported by written assessment sheets which help the teachers in monitoring the children's work. Increasingly, the teachers are becoming more familiar with the range of resources and programs provided through Classroom 2000 (C2k), and, importantly, how these programs may be used to enhance the children's learning.

2.11 In KS1, the children use a range of software programs to support their understanding in English and mathematics. They acquire good keyboard skills and, by year 4, are able to word-process their work in a variety of forms including poems, stories and reports. In addition, they use data-handling programs to present information graphically. By the end of KS1, the children are able to change font, size and colour, to save and retrieve their work with assistance, and to print work independently.

2.12 In KS2, the children's use of ICT continues to be developed; they are able to import graphics to improve the design and presentation of their processed text, to insert photographs from various sources into their writing, some produced by the school's digital camera, and create and search databases. At the end of KS2, the children's skills in, and use of, ICT are

recognised through the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) accreditation scheme. Overall, the teachers have worked hard to enhance the experiences for the children in and through the use of ICT. There is still, however, much development work to be undertaken. The staff are aware of the need to develop further the children's experiences, and are currently working through action plans to ensure more coherence, breadth and progression in the various strands of the ICT Programme of Study.

2.13 The school identifies approximately 29% of the children as having SEN. The majority of these children require educational support for their work in English. The school makes good use of the expertise of the class teachers and a range of standardised test to identify those children who will enter the SEN programme. Most of the support provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the team of SEN teachers is accomplished through withdrawal sessions, but useful in-class support is also given for some activities. The classroom assistants make a valuable contribution to supporting the work both within the classroom and, in some cases, during the withdrawal sessions. Liaison between the SEN teachers and the class teachers is good. All the teachers are hard-working and committed to building up the confidence and self-esteem of the children; they are making good progress in this regard. Appropriate records are kept of the work completed and of the progress being made by individual children.

2.14 The SENCO, who has only recently been appointed to this post, has completed a useful audit of the present provision for SEN. While the school is appropriately focusing on supporting those children who are identified as having significant learning difficulties, there needs to be a sharper focus on identifying and implementing the specific strategies to be used in mainstream classes to help the much larger additional proportion of children identified as having SEN who are not being supported through the withdrawal or class support programme. The school has already identified this as an important area to be addressed and the inspection findings would endorse this as a key issue.

2.15 The school reports that the involvement of parents in its work, and in the education of their children, was facilitated greatly by its former "Parents' Centre". This centre, located in a temporary classroom near the main school building, included ICT and crèche facilities. It was used regularly by the parents and provided a range of opportunities for those wishing to return to study, or to develop skills to assist their children in their education. The centre has recently closed through lack of funding but the school hopes to re-open this valuable facility if funding allows. The school has joined other local primary and nursery schools in an initiative designed to facilitate curriculum and pastoral links; this has potential benefits for the continuing education and pastoral welfare of all the children in the various schools. The inspection findings would endorse the development of this initiative as an important priority for the local area. The links and relationships with the parents and the local community are very good and a strong feature. The school works hard at, and ensures that, the parents feel welcome in the school and have a ready access to the Principal and teachers. The parents support school functions and religious celebrations, and some assist in the life and work of the school.

2.16 The Principal has been in post for just over two years. She is strongly supportive of the welfare of the staff and the children. She is committed to the school, knows the children well, and has worked hard since her appointment to develop a strong sense of team-work. She deals well with the daily organisation and management. Under her guidance, some duties, particularly at senior management level, have been re-allocated. This is having a

beneficial impact on the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching. The school reports plans for a further redefinition of roles and responsibilities at senior management and other levels. The inspection endorses this as a key priority. The teachers benefit from the advice provided by the co-ordinators for English and ICT who undertake their roles enthusiastically and diligently. The role of the co-ordinators in the school, generally, needs strengthening, particularly in monitoring and evaluating the standards reached in their areas of responsibility and in interweaving their work more strongly with the senior management team (SMT).

2.17 Most of the areas for improvement highlighted in this report have already been identified by the school. The school should consider adjusting its development plan to take into account the detail of the findings from this inspection, and prioritise its response to the areas identified for improvement. There is a need to improve the effectiveness of the target-setting arrangements, focusing sharply on the standards expected and achieved in literacy and numeracy for children of all abilities within the school. Allied to this, there is a need to make more effective use of performance data and first-hand evidence already gained from monitoring to review and inform further improvements in learning and teaching.

### 3. CONCLUSION

#### 3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent quality of pastoral care which is a key feature of the school's work;
- the very good working relationships and the clear sense of team-work;
- the very good behaviour of the children;
- the caring ethos and mutual respect within which the children are valued;
- the extra-curricular activities including those celebrating the children's own culture;
- the good quality displays celebrating the children's work, particularly their work in art and design;
- the hard-working and conscientious staff;
- the leadership of the relatively newly-appointed Principal who has worked hard at, and succeeded in, creating a strong sense of team-work;
- the clear evidence that the school works hard at, and succeeds in, involving the surrounding community in its life and work;
- the recent re-allocation of some duties, particularly at senior management level, which is having a beneficial impact on the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation; and
- the well-presented children's work which is marked regularly.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to have a sharper focus on the standards expected and achieved in both key stages: the standards achieved could be substantially higher than they are presently; and
- to make more effective use of performance data and first-hand evidence already gained from monitoring to review and inform further improvements in learning and teaching.

3.3 In the areas under focus the school has significant strengths. The important areas for improvement need to be addressed if the school is to meet as fully as possible the needs of all the children.