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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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Short Inspection

St Mary's Primary School
Dechomet, Ballyward, Castlewellan

Inspected: May 2009

ST MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, DECHOMET, BALLYWARD, CASTLEWELLAN, CO DOWN, BT31 9QE (503-3011)

St Mary's Primary School, Dechomet is situated in Ballyward, Co Down. The enrolment is currently 76 and has remained steady for many years. Almost 12% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. The school has identified approximately 15% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Of the 51 questionnaires issued to the parents; 26 (51%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE), including 13 which contained an additional written comments. The Inspection team also met separately with a member of the Board of Governors and with a parent.

The parental questionnaires and written comments indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of school life; reference was made to the hard-working and approachable staff, the happy and caring ethos, the effective induction arrangements for new children, the excellent communication with parents, and the support for children of all abilities. A small number of parents raised minor concerns which have been discussed with the Principal. The teachers' responses were wholly positive.

The inspectors also met with a group of children from year 6; they talked enthusiastically about their experiences at school and the support and encouragement they receive from the staff. The children reported that they were happy, felt safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are the positive working relationships at all levels which foster an inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school and the excellent behaviour and the responsiveness of the children who are well-mannered and welcoming to visitors.

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

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity; through for example encouraging the children to eat healthy breaks, access to filtered water and the range of sporting activities available, all of which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

The strengths of the school include the:

- happy, relaxed and inclusive atmosphere and the positive working relationships at all levels;
- well-maintained environment for learning;
- quality of the teaching which was good or better in the lessons observed;
- progress made by the children which is commensurate with their age and ability;

- collegial decision making and culture of self evaluation which have led to effective developmental planning focused on key areas for school improvement; and
- leadership and management of the Principal who is ably supported by all of the staff.

In the areas inspected, the quality of 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.

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.

Throughout the report a number of quantitative terms are used which may be interpreted as indicated below:

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---------------|
| 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% |

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