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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

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

**Ben Madigan Preparatory School  
Belfast**

**Inspected: April 2005**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK	1
3.	CONCLUSION	4
	APPENDIX	6

## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Ben Madigan Preparatory School** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 18.04.05**  
**Belfast**
- ii. **School Reference Number: 162-0028** iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/Mathematics/ICT**

B.

School Year	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Year 1 Intake	19	22	30	21	22
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	195	177	177	156	137
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):

96%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
------------------------	-----------------	-----------------

- |    |  |          |              |   |
|----|--|----------|--------------|---|
| D. | i. Number of Teachers<br>(including the principal and part-time teachers):<br>(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 8.37     | 0            | 0 |
|    | ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):   | 19.24    | NI PTR: 20.0 |   |
|    | iii. Average Class Size:   | 20       |              |   |
|    | iv. Class Size (Range):  | 15 to 24 |              |   |
|    | v. Ancillary Support:<br>Number of Hours <b>Per Week</b> :   |          |              |   |
|    | i. Clerical support:   |          | 25           |   |
|    | ii. Official Making A Good Start Support:  |          | 0            |   |
|    | iii. Making A Good Start funding additional hours and other classroom assistant support:                                 |          | 20           |   |
|    | vi. Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs:   |          | 1            |   |
|    | vii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age:   |          | 0            |   |
|    | viii. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:  |          | 0            |   |

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Ben Madigan Preparatory School, the preparatory department of Belfast Royal Academy, is situated on the Antrim Road in north Belfast. Many of the children live in the immediate area; a significant minority travel from the outlying areas of greater Belfast and from the east Antrim area. No children are in receipt of free school meals.

1.2 The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

1.3 As part of the inspection process meetings were held with the Board of Governors (BOG), and with a small group of children in year 6. The parents' views on aspects of the life and work of the school were also sought by means of a questionnaire. Approximately 128 questionnaires were sent to parents by the school; 33% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE), ten of which contained written comments. Nearly all of the comments in the questionnaires were very favourable. In particular, the parents and the BoG mentioned the positive ethos evident throughout the school and considered the teachers to be hard-working and caring of the children. In addition, the parents expressed confidence in the manner in which the school manages issues associated with bullying and in catering for the needs of the small number of children who have difficulty with their learning; these issues, they report, are dealt with sensitively and effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) endorses all of these views. The very small number of minor concerns that were raised by the parents are dealt with in the body of the report or were discussed with the governors and the Principal.

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

2.1 A strong sense of community pervades the life and work of the school. The working relationships between the staff and the children are very good. The children are very well behaved, friendly and courteous to visitors.

2.2 The teachers know the children well; the supportive and encouraging teaching approaches that they often adopt help to create an atmosphere in which the children feel secure and at ease. Good opportunities are provided for the children to contribute orally in lessons and consequently they develop their confidence and self-esteem. The parents are welcomed into the school and their fund-raising activities, organised by the Friends of the Academy, have benefited the school greatly.

2.3 The teachers have worked hard to create a stimulating learning environment for the children. The standard of caretaking is very good.

2.4 The teachers are extremely hard-working and are committed to the children in their care. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities which provide the children with enriching opportunities to develop further their interests, particularly in music, physical education and in introducing them to a modern language. The school makes special efforts to celebrate the diversity of the cultures and backgrounds the children bring to the school.

2.5 A significant feature of the school's provision is the strong emphasis given to the pastoral care arrangements for the children. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in DE Circular 1999/10, "Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection" and in Circular 2003/13, "Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order" and has identified appropriately further areas for development within its pastoral programme. Procedures for dealing with child protection matters are set out clearly in a child protection policy and all the staff have received relevant training. The children are taught to be aware of issues such as bullying and personal safety, and during 'Circle Time' they talk about issues that are important to their personal and social development. Information on the school's procedures for handling complaints and the school policy on bullying is sent regularly to parents. These policies are also available for parents to view on the Ben Madigan section of the Belfast Royal Academy website. The school has conducted a survey of the children's views on aspects of pastoral care and bullying. Analyses of the outcomes of this survey will be used to inform the proposed review of pastoral policies, including the policy on bullying.

2.6 The work of the school is supported by useful whole-school planning documents which ensure that the children study a good range of topics across the curriculum. The teachers plan conscientiously and they are well-organised and prepared for lessons. More recently, the teachers have identified the need for the planning to be developed further to identify more clearly the expected learning outcomes for the lessons and how these are to be achieved; this is timely.

2.7 The overall quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was good; in a significant number of instances it was excellent.

2.8 The school places a strong emphasis on developing the children's knowledge and understanding of mathematics. The whole-school guidance ensures that the children are provided with a broad and balanced mathematics programme and provides a secure and progressive framework for the teachers' individual planning. In recent years, under the guidance of the committed and enthusiastic co-ordinator, the planning for mathematics has been reviewed. The teachers have identified appropriately the need to set out more clearly how the content, resources and teaching strategies employed within each lesson are to be adapted to meet the learning needs of individual children.

2.9 In many classes mathematical learning takes place through other aspects of the curriculum. The younger children are introduced to mathematics through a variety of appropriate experiences which include structured play, stories and rhymes; they clearly enjoy these activities. They respond enthusiastically in class and they are developing good mental strategies for calculation, investigating and for solving problems. The work undertaken in these early years provides a good foundation for future developments in mathematics. The children are gaining confidence and accuracy in their work in number; they are achieving good standards in their mathematical work in class.

2.10 In key stage (KS) 2, the children are secure in their understanding of key concepts and the teachers' skilful use of questioning promotes well their mathematical reasoning. The children get on with their set tasks swiftly and with considerable commitment. A suitable range of teaching approaches is evident in most classes. In recent years, the teachers have focused on providing the children with a wider range of opportunities to undertake more open-ended investigative activities in order that they can apply their mathematical learning in

different contexts and develop greater flexibility in their thinking. As part of the review of the mathematics programme a greater priority is being given to regular sessions of mental mathematics. The children, in both key stages, enjoy these mental mathematics sessions. By the end of KS2 the standards achieved by the children in mathematics are very good.

2.11 The school policy for structured play provides broad guidance for the organisation and the content of play activities across the infant classes. The co-ordinator is currently undertaking a review of the whole-school planning to ensure that the documentation reflects more accurately the practice that has evolved in recent years. The play sessions are organised effectively and the teachers ensure that the practical activities support or complement work across the curriculum. In each of the sessions seen, the play was well sustained and the children's levels of enjoyment and concentration were good.

2.12 The school has made good progress in developing the provision for ICT and its use across the curriculum. An appropriate policy for ICT is in place for both key stages; this identifies teaching and learning objectives for the four strands and provides practical guidance for their implementation. The school library is used effectively as a central resource area and contains a cluster of networked computers; in addition, each classroom holds at least one computer. All the full-time teachers have completed successfully their New Opportunities Funding (NOF) ICT training and they make good use of the ICT equipment for both administrative and teaching purposes.

2.13 The children have ample opportunities to exploit ICT applications during lessons across a range of subjects and, in particular, to reinforce literacy and numeracy skills. The older children word-process some of their work and they illustrate and improve its presentation using graphics software. The children make suitable use of the Internet to search for information on a range of appropriate topics and they integrate images from the digital camera into their work. By the end of KS2 the vast majority of the children show confidence and skill in their engagement with ICT. The children in year 7 are entered for the KS2 IT accreditation scheme and have achieved good results for their work in this area.

2.14 The school shows a strong commitment to the children with special educational needs (SEN) and has dedicated a significant proportion of its staff and material resources to support them. Just over one-tenth of the children have been identified through appropriate assessment strategies as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Realistic education plans have been drawn up for individual children who are in most need. A combination of in-class support and withdrawal for individual sessions of literacy and numeracy is provided for these children. A feature of the school's provision in this area is the after school club which provides additional learning support for children in KS2.

2.15 In the withdrawal lessons, the children learn in a warm environment; they respond well to the encouragement given to them by their teachers. In mathematics, there is a suitable emphasis on practical activities using helpful resources and equipment. The teachers review the children's progress and they consult regularly with the parents. For a few children progress is slow but the majority are making steady progress consistent with their abilities.

2.16 The Principal has been in post for eleven years; she is enthusiastic, committed to the school and gives clear and effective leadership. She sets the tone for the school and, in spite of a significant teaching commitment, has worked with the staff to produce a comprehensive set of aims and whole-school policies. The Vice-principal and other members of the senior management team (SMT) provide strong support for the Principal in the day-to-day management of the school.

2.17 In recent years the staff have been involved in much curriculum development; this is reflected in the School Development Plan (SDP) which is reviewed and updated regularly. A key priority identified in the SDP is the implementation of appropriate strategies for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching and the standards achieved by the children. A good start has been made to the process by the Principal. There is a need to build on this useful start by giving the subject co-ordinators greater responsibility for this aspect of management.

2.18 The school has developed systematic arrangements for assessment, recording and reporting. Detailed records and samples of the children's work are kept. A series of tests, including standardised tests, are used to obtain an overview of the children's performance and to monitor their progress. The SMT is making good use of this data and other outcomes to set targets for improvement and to inform future planning. The parents are kept informed of their children's progress through comprehensive annual written reports and parental interviews at various stages of the school year.

2.19 This year the school has been able to employ a classroom assistant to support the teacher and the year 1 children. The children respond well to this additional adult in their class and turn readily to her for support.

2.20 There are sufficient suitably qualified and experienced teachers to meet the school's curricular and pastoral needs. In addition, the school employs part-time specialists for art, music and physical education. The teachers have attended a range of suitable internal and external in-service training (INSET) courses to support them in their work. Much of the school's INSET has been focused appropriately on the priorities for development identified in the SDP, notably, in numeracy, literacy and ICT. This training has had a positive impact on classroom practice in the areas under focus.

2.21 The school has sufficient accommodation to meet its current needs. A number of health and safety concerns were identified and are appended.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the ethos, including:
  - the quality of the working relationships throughout the school;
  - the relaxed and secure learning environment created by the teachers;
  - the behaviour of the children;
  - the quality of the display in classrooms;
  - the range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children by the teachers.

- the hard-working and conscientious teachers;
- the quality of the teaching which is good and, in a significant number of classes, excellent;
- the quality of the children's responses;
- the quality of the pastoral care throughout the school;
- the provision made for the children who require additional support with their learning;
- the overall quality of the work in mathematics and the standards achieved by the children;
- the quality of the children's experiences in the use of ICT;
- the quality of the leadership provided by the Principal in all aspects of the work of the school.

3.2 There were no significant areas for improvement identified. The Inspectorate endorses the areas for development identified by the school through its own self-evaluative processes.

3.3 In the areas under focus the quality of education provided in this school is good. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being well met.

## **APPENDIX**

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- The fence surrounding the hard-surface play area is too low.
- The windows of the classrooms beside the playground which are close to ground level are not glazed with safety glass.
- The storage arrangements for the mats used for physical education are inadequate.
- The large play items at the rear of the school are in a poor state of repair.

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