

St Mark's Primary School Hamilton South Lanarkshire Council

24 October 2006

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1. Background

St Mark's Primary School was inspected in June 2006 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council and staff. Members of the inspection team also met representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents¹. There was no School Board.

St Mark's Primary School is a denominational school serving Little Earnock, Earnock Wood and Torhead Farm areas of Hamilton. At the time of the inspection the roll was 121. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. The school was part of the John Ogilvie High School Learning Community. The long term absence of the headteacher due to ill-health over a period of two years had caused the school disrupted leadership. At the time of the inspection, the school was being led by a headteacher who had been in post for six weeks.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Staff's commitment to the school and to the care and welfare of pupils.
- Recent improvements in attainment in mathematics.
- The leadership of the new headteacher and her plans for future improvement.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in [Appendix 2](#).

Parents were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. Almost all felt that staff made them feel welcome and showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. Almost all felt that their children enjoyed being at the school which had a good reputation in the community. A few parents did not feel that the school was good at consulting them. About a third did not think the school informed them sufficiently about the priorities for improving the education of their children. Pupils were very positive about their school. Almost all felt safe, well-looked after, and that they got on well with each other. They thought that teachers expected them to work hard, and explained things clearly. Around a fifth did not feel that pupils behaved well. A few felt that the school did not deal with bullying effectively and that they were not treated fairly. Teaching staff were pleased about almost all aspects of the school. They felt there was a welcoming, friendly environment in the school and that they all worked well as part of a team. Support staff were positive on almost all aspects of the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was adequate. The school provided pupils with a generally broad curriculum which was enhanced by the contribution of visits, excursions and visitors. Effective use of flexibility time had led to improvements in pupils' attainment in mathematics. Teachers had made good progress in delivering an effective literacy programme at the early stages. However, listening and talking was not systematically developed and assessed across the school. The headteacher recognised the need to review all programmes of study to ensure continuity and progression in the development of pupils' knowledge and understanding in each curriculum area. The quality of teaching varied across the school. Teachers were beginning to share the purposes of lessons with pupils and, a few revisited these at the end. Generally there were clear instructions and directions. A minority of teachers used a variety of teaching approaches to help meet pupils' learning needs. Teachers made effective use of questions to check all pupils' knowledge and understanding. Praise was not used consistently across the school. Occasionally, tasks set by teachers did not engage pupils fully in their learning. Teachers made too little use of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance learning and teaching. Homework was used regularly in most classes, but it lacked variety and it was not used well to consolidate learning.

The majority of pupils were well behaved and worked well on tasks given by their teachers. Pupils from P1 to P3 had good opportunities to be active in their learning, for example through planned play activities. Pupils in P3 and P4 responded well when working in group activities in mathematics. However, collaborative approaches were not well developed across the curriculum. Pupils generally did not show enthusiasm and were often not ready to learn. A few pupils did not work well on their own and were easily distracted. The pace of lessons was variable across the school and at times, pupils were passive learners. Pupils had too few opportunities to think for themselves or reflect on ideas and experiences. There were limited opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

Pupils from across the school were involved in a wide range of out-of-school activities. Pupils in P4 and in P6/7 had developed their personal and social skills through their participation in pastoral and educational residential trips. Pupils were developing their sports skills at after-school clubs including badminton, netball and football. All pupils developed their self-esteem and confidence through their participation in the annual school show. Across the school, pupils were developing skills through a range of enterprise activities. Funds raised by pupils in P5 and P6 had been used to purchase resources for computers in the school. Pupils were aware of the needs of others and regularly raised sums of money for charities. Participation in Easter school and in the Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools initiative (GOALS) enhanced P7 pupils' learning and self confidence.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was adequate. It had been variable over the past three years. Across the school, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading, and the majority in writing. Many at P2 were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, a few pupils at each stage, were capable of even higher levels of attainment. Those pupils who were experiencing difficulty in reading were effectively supported. In almost all classes, pupils did not listen attentively in class and their listening and talking skills were not well developed. Pupils at all stages read fluently and showed good understanding of what they had read. Pupils at the early stages were making good progress in developing reading skills. Across the school, a significant number of boys did not regularly read for pleasure and were unfamiliar with authors and books. Pupils' writing skills were not sufficiently well developed. At all stages, pupils needed further opportunities to write at greater length. They did not have a sufficiently well developed understanding of writing styles or how to write for different audiences. Standards of handwriting and presentation required significant improvement.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. In recent years, levels of attainment in mathematics had improved steadily. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in mathematics. At P2 and P3 many pupils were

achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, a few pupils at the middle and upper stages were capable of achieving even higher standards by being set more challenging tasks. Almost all pupils were making good progress in their coursework. Pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress towards agreed targets. By P7, pupils could confidently interpret information from a range of graphs and charts and were starting to develop appropriate skills in using computers to handle information. Across the school, pupils' number skills were well developed. A few, however, were not skilled in carrying out mental calculations. Pupils had a good knowledge and understanding of the properties of shapes. At all stages, pupils were able to use a range of strategies to help solve mathematical problems. Their skills in choosing the most effective strategy to solve particular problems were limited.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils were good. Almost all pupils enjoyed being at school and felt safe and secure. All staff had a clear understanding of their role and responsibility in relation to child protection issues. Staff were caring and committed and they knew pupils and their families well. The school had clearly stated policies in place to deal with child protection issues and the administration of medicine. The school provided effective support for vulnerable pupils. Although an anti-bullying policy was in place, the procedures had not been kept up to date in the recent past.

Overall, there were important weaknesses in how well pupils' learning needs were met. Staff did not make effective use of assessment information to identify and plan next steps in learning. Across the school many tasks and activities were too narrowly based on text book exercises and were not sufficiently challenging. Pupils were not consistently involved in setting targets for their learning. Support staff provided good assistance for teachers. The support for learning teacher worked effectively with pupils to support learning in reading and mathematics. She had prepared appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) and shared these with pupils and parents. Class teachers and the support for learning teacher, now needed to consult about how best to address pupils' additional learning needs in class. Although the school had appropriate arrangements in place to support pupils as they moved from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school they needed to ensure that effective transition planning was in place for all children with identified additional support needs.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation and facilities was good. Classrooms were small but staff made good use of additional teaching areas. These included the separate ICT suite and the open areas for planned play activities and topic work. Classroom displays were generally neither attractive nor stimulating and there

	<p>was limited display of pupils' work. Access to the school was suitable for those with physical disabilities. Security arrangements for the building were appropriate. The school had an extensive grass area to use for additional play and educational purposes. The building was in need of a number of repairs and the toilets were in need of upgrading. The education authority had plans to re-roof and refurbish the building.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Staff and pupils had a strong sense of identity and pride in the school. The school had a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Staff were committed to their pupils and morale was high. Most pupils were polite and generally well behaved. However, a few did not always treat each other with appropriate respect. Approaches in managing behaviour and discipline were in need of review. Weekly school assemblies provided regular opportunities for religious observance. The headteacher had identified the need to develop whole school approaches to promote and celebrate pupil success. Pupils had some opportunities to take on responsibilities through the pupil council and the buddy system. Teachers had variable expectations of pupils' attainment, quality of work and behaviour. Teachers did not set appropriately high standards for pupils' achievement. Aspects of school programmes, including religious and moral education, helped promote positive attitudes to others and a celebration of difference. The school did not, however, promote equality issues consistently.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The school's partnership with parents and the community was good. The school communicated effectively with parents through frequent newsletters and letters on specific topics. Teachers produced regular informative reports on pupil's progress. There were appropriate arrangements in place to consult parents on sensitive health issues. Curriculum evenings were held for sacramental preparation. While there was no School Board, the active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provided good support to the school. Parents contributed to a range of charity fundraising activities. The school was developing good links with other schools within the John Ogilvie High School Learning Community. Pupils provided Christmas entertainment for local elderly people. There were strong connections with the local church and the school chaplain provided very good support to the school. There was limited involvement of parents in the work of the school and parents were not yet fully involved in supporting their children's learning.</p>

7. Improving the school

[Appendix 1](#) provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

St Mark's Primary School provided an adequate standard of education for its pupils. Staff were caring and committed to the school and morale was high. Staff worked well as a team. Pupils were happy at school. However, whole school attainment levels, while showing improvements in mathematics, remained below national averages in English language. There was scope for improvements in the quality of pupils' learning experiences and in meeting the needs of all learners. Pupils across the school were capable of achieving higher standards with improved and more consistent pace and challenge in their learning. There was a need to improve the whole school approach to promoting and celebrating achievement.

There had been an unsettled period for staff and pupils in recent years. The school had lacked focus and clear strategic direction. Staff had not received appropriate leadership, guidance and direction on a range of curricular areas, on planning or on learning and teaching. The new headteacher had a clear vision for the school, with a strong focus on learning and teaching and improving the quality of pupils' experiences. She had a realistic view of the school's priorities and had prepared a systematic, rigorous approach to moving the school forward. She had shared this vision with staff. They fully supported her and were clear about their role in working as a team in taking the school forward. The headteacher demonstrated a high level of professional competence and was committed to the school and its community. Parents and staff had commented on the positive impact she had already made on the school. The school's approach to self-evaluation was weak. Tracking of pupils' performance had been successful in improving attainment in mathematics in recent years. However, the monitoring procedures in place were not rigorous and had resulted in a number of pupils not making sufficient progress. There had not been a culture of self-evaluation in the school. There was a very wide variation in the quality of learning, and this had not been recognised or addressed. Staff, parents and pupils were not sufficiently involved in evaluating the performance of the school. The school required to develop a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning, teaching and attainment. The new headteacher had already been successful in establishing effective staff teamwork to identify areas for improvement. Teachers had agreed an appropriate range of development activities and demonstrated a willingness to rise to the challenge of improving many aspects of the school.

Main points for action

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to improve the quality of pupils' learning experiences and their achievements in key areas of the curriculum. In so doing they should take account of the need to:

- ensure that tasks and activities provide sufficient challenge and support to meet the needs of all learners;
- continue to improve attainment across the school, especially in English language;
- raise expectations and develop a whole school approach to promoting and celebrating achievement; and
- develop systematic and rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the

work of the school.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Mary Hoey
HM Inspector

24 October 2006

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
Structure of the curriculum	adequate
The teaching process	adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	weak
Pupils' attainment in English language	adequate
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good
How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	good
Meeting pupils' needs	weak
How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	weak
Equality and fairness	adequate
Partnership with parents and the community	good
Improving the school	

Leadership	good
Self-evaluation	weak

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	excellent
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school had a good reputation in the local community. Staff made them feel welcome in the school and they found parents' evenings helpful and informative. Staff showed care and concern for their children's welfare and there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils at the school. Their children enjoyed being at school, were treated fairly and found school work stimulating and challenging. The school encouraged their children to work to the best of their ability. The school dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They felt they needed a clearer view about the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils. The school needed to consult them more on decisions which affected their child.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers expected them to work hard, explained things clearly and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They had concerns about the behaviour of some pupils.

<p>helped them when they were having difficulties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They felt safe and well looked after and the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • Teachers told them when they were doing well and how to improve their learning. • Teachers knew them well and listened to what they had to say. • Pupils enjoyed being at school, got on well with each other and had opportunities to make decisions on how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few felt that the school need to be better at dealing with bullies. • A few thought that pupils were not treated fairly in the school.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and support staff had very positive views about almost all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few support staff thought that they did not have good opportunities to be involved in decision-making in the school.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Executive Director (Education Resources), local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/>.

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Our complaints procedure

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor,

Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.
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1. Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.
