

# **St Mark's Primary School and Nursery Class Rutherglen South Lanarkshire Council**

23 October 2007

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## **1. Background**

St Mark's Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in June 2007 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, 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 parents<sup>1</sup>. There was no School Board.

St Mark's Primary School is a denominational school serving the Blairbeth, Burnside, Fernhill and Spittal areas of Rutherglen. The school formed part of the Trinity Learning Community. At the time of the inspection the roll was 226, including 49 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- ◆ The leadership of the headteacher.
- ◆ The quality of provision in the nursery.
- ◆ The commitment of staff to meeting learning needs.
- ◆ Positive relationships between staff and pupils.
- ◆ Concern shown by all staff for care and welfare throughout the nursery and school.
- ◆ Partnership arrangements with parents and the community.

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

Parents were very positive about almost all aspects of the nursery and school's work. Parents of nursery children thought children enjoyed being at nursery and were treated fairly by staff. They felt the nursery had good resources and that their children found the activities stimulating and challenging. Parents of primary pupils felt welcome within the school and found parents' evenings helpful and informative. They felt the school had a good reputation in the community. A few were concerned about the condition of the school buildings. Pupils enjoyed being at school and thought the staff helped to keep them safe and healthy. They felt that teachers explained things clearly and told them when they had done something well. All staff enjoyed working in the school and valued the opportunities to be involved in decision making. They felt the school celebrated pupils' successes regularly and dealt with any instances of indiscipline effectively. Staff and parents thought the school was well led.

## **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The overall quality of the curriculum was very good. The school provided pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum which helped them to develop a range of effective skills. In the nursery, staff planned a wide range of stimulating and challenging activities. However, children would benefit from more opportunities for outside play. Across the school, teachers had made effective use of additional time to improve attainment in English language and mathematics. At all stages, pupils benefited from a programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE), which was helping to develop their personal and social skills. Pupils were making good progress in developing their skills in information and communications technology (ICT). Each class took part in an enterprise activity as part of their planned curriculum. The school was at the stage of planning for two hours of quality physical education each week. The overall quality of teaching was good. In some instances, it was very good. Teachers were well organised, planned their lessons carefully

and gave clear explanations. In most classes, teachers shared the purposes of lessons and reviewed learning at the end of each lesson. Across the school, teachers used a good variety of teaching approaches. However, they did not always make sufficient use of questioning to challenge pupils' thinking. Teachers provided pupils with a range of appropriate homework activities.

The overall quality of pupils' learning was good. In the nursery, staff interacted very effectively with children to support and extend their learning and encourage them to think and develop ideas. Children were developing appropriate skills when using programmable toys and the computer. Most enjoyed investigating the properties of magnets and had very good skills in handling materials when cutting, using hammers and playing with small toys. They used their imagination well and took part in role-play in the hospital. Most children were developing confidence in balancing, hopping, jumping and skipping. They were developing an understanding of personal space during physical activity. Across the primary classes, most pupils were motivated and behaved well. At P1, pupils responded very well to opportunities which required them to be active in their learning, including imaginative play activities. At all stages, most pupils worked well on tasks without close supervision. However, at times, a few pupils were off task and distracted others. In the most successful lessons, pupils had opportunities to collaborate with others and be actively involved. Visiting teachers of music and art made valuable contributions to developing pupils' learning. For example, pupils across the school were developing their creativity in art and design, producing good quality work using a variety of techniques and media. Pupils at P6 and P7 were making good progress in learning French.

The school actively promoted pupils' wider achievements. Children in the nursery were happy and settled. They cooperated well with each other and confidently made decisions and choices in their learning. Across the primary stages, pupils were involved in a range of enterprise activities which encouraged team work. These skills were enhanced through preparation for the school's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Pupils were developing citizenship skills by taking responsibility for specific duties, including older pupils acting as buddies for younger children. Across the school, pupils took part in a variety of activities to develop their confidence, self-esteem and respect for others. For example, at P1 to P3 pupils regularly took part in massage. Pupils had opportunities to be actively involved in decision making through the pupil council. A significant number participated in a variety of after-school activities including football, athletics, and clubs for homework and computing. At all stages, pupils had a good knowledge of healthy lifestyles and they strongly promoted aspects of healthy living during their annual 'Health Day'. Commendably they had received a gold award as a health promoting school. Pupils at P6 and P7 benefited from taking part in a residential trip.

## **English language**

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in all aspects of communication and language. They spoke confidently and listened attentively to instructions and explanations. Most could write their name and were

encouraged to recognise letters in their play activities. Across the primary classes, the quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. A significant number were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who required support in aspects of English language were making appropriate progress. Across the school, pupils were making good progress in developing their skills in listening and talking. They listened well to instructions and responded appropriately during class discussions. At P6 and P7, pupils spoke clearly and were developing a good awareness of audience. They were less skilled in group discussion. Pupils were making very good progress in reading. Pupils read with fluency and accuracy and showed a very good understanding of what they had read. At P6 and P7, pupils talked confidently about their favourite authors and explained why they enjoyed certain books. At all stages, pupils wrote regularly for a variety of purposes. They were developing good skills in structuring and organising their ideas. They now needed to develop their writing within other curricular areas.

## **Mathematics**

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in early mathematics. They were developing a very good understanding of early number and showed a keen interest in counting. Children matched and sorted a variety of objects and could recognise basic shapes during play. Overall, the quality of attainment in mathematics in P1 to P7 was very good. Across the primary classes, high levels of attainment had been maintained over recent years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. At the early stages, a significant number were attaining these standards earlier than might normally be expected. Those pupils who had not yet attained national levels were making suitable progress in their classwork. At all stages, pupils were developing skills in information handling and, by P7, they could process information effectively and interpret a broad range of graphs. Pupils had used computers to create databases, display mathematical information and reinforce various aspects of their mathematics. At all stages, pupils carried out written calculations accurately. However, a few pupils lacked agility in mental calculations. By P7, pupils had a good knowledge of symmetry. However they lacked confidence in describing properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems were well developed and they were able to choose appropriate problem solving strategies.

## **5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?**

The school met learning needs in the nursery and primary classes very well. In the nursery, staff provided a wide range of activities and tasks which were well matched to children's interests and needs. They made very good use of assessment information to ensure children made appropriate progress with their learning. In primary classes, teachers took good account of prior learning in planning work for groups and individuals. They provided well-balanced support and challenge in most lessons. Pupils performed well in tasks set by

their teacher. Teachers identified pupils in need of support promptly as part of the school's effective early intervention programme. Arrangements for addressing the needs of pupils with additional support needs were very effective. The visiting support teachers and support assistants worked effectively with pupils. Links with other agencies such as speech and language therapy and psychological services were very good and were having a positive impact on meeting pupils' needs. A behaviour support worker provided valuable assistance for individual pupils and their families. Pupils with individualised educational programmes (IEPs) had clear learning targets and were making good progress towards meeting these. Pupils with English as an additional language were very well supported and were making good progress.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were very good. The headteacher and staff knew pupils very well and were sensitive to their personal, social and emotional needs. The school had suitable procedures for child protection which the staff followed appropriately. The school had taken good steps to promote a healthy lifestyle, for example, by providing a variety of after-school activities and through promoting healthy eating. A nurse from the Community Health Partnership provided very good support and advice for pupils and their parents. The school had appropriate procedures in place for the storage and administration of medication. There were well-planned induction programmes in place for pupils entering P1 and for P7 pupils transferring to Trinity High School.
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. Classrooms were bright and attractive and pupils' work was effectively displayed around the school. Pupils benefited from an ICT suite and the use of a separate gymnasium and dining hall. However, some areas of accommodation were in need of refurbishment and redecoration. Pupils' toilets required urgent attention. The lack of a nursery outside area limited opportunities for children to take part in outside play experiences. Pupils had access to a large playground area which had recently been developed to include a garden and seating area. Appropriate security arrangements were in place.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting	Staff, pupils and parents were very proud of their school. Staff morale was high and relationships with pupils were very good. Staff and pupils worked well together and there was a strong sense of community within the school.

achievement and equality	Throughout the school, most pupils were polite and behaved well. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievements, and they dealt effectively with incidents concerning pupils' behaviour. Staff used praise well to motivate pupils. The school recognised pupils' achievements in a range of appropriate ways, including 'Pupil of the Week'. Regular assemblies provided opportunities for religious observance and celebrating achievement. There was a strong sense of equality and fairness in the school. The school had developed a helpful policy on racial equality. Pupils were developing positive attitudes about diversity, race equality and the needs of others. The school regularly supported charities at home and abroad. Pupils learned about other cultures and beliefs through the religious and moral education programme.
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established effective links with parents and the local community. Parents were very positive about the work of the school. The PTA regularly raised funds to support a wide range of school activities. The school kept parents well informed through regular, informative newsletters, curricular workshops and written pupil reports. Parents were regularly consulted about aspects of the school, including sensitive health issues. Nursery parents had very good opportunities to be involved in their children's learning. The school was an important part of the local community. It linked well with a wide range of support agencies, including community police and health professionals. The parish priest made regular visits to the school and provided valued support. Pupils regularly participated in special Masses. Members of the community participated in school events, for example, the recent 50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The school had very good links with the associated secondary, local schools and the Trinity Learning Community.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

St Mark's Primary School had successfully established a positive, caring environment for pupils. Nursery staff provided nursery children with high quality learning experiences. All staff worked well as a team and had developed strong relationships with pupils. The school met the needs of the pupils very well. The quality of teaching was good and in some instances very good. School staff promoted and celebrated pupils' many achievements, and

had worked hard to maintain very good levels of attainment in reading and mathematics. Pupils' skills in writing were improving.

The headteacher provided the school with very good leadership. She was well respected by parents, pupils and staff. She was highly committed to the school and had successfully developed a positive climate for learning. She had developed effective teamwork amongst all staff and supported them very well. The headteacher provided a clear strategic direction for the school, and had led improvements in attainment and approaches to teaching and learning. The school had good procedures for evaluating its work. Across the primary stages, the headteacher monitored teachers' plans, observed teaching and learning and sampled pupils' work. She gave valuable feedback to staff. Staff needed to be fully involved in evaluating the work of the school and nursery to improve teaching and learning and ensure consistency across classes. The work of the nursery required more systematic monitoring. The headteacher was well supported in leading the school by the principal teachers who shared a full time post. Both had clear remits which they carried out effectively. They made a very positive contribution to the life and work of the nursery and school. Nursery staff were familiar with the Scottish Social Services Codes of Practice and their implications for the nursery. With ongoing support from the education authority, the school had a clear capacity to improve further.

At the last Care Commission inspection there were four recommendations relating to recruitment policies and procedures. These had not yet been met.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority should take action to improve aspects of learning, teaching and attainment. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- ◆ continue to improve attainment in writing;
- ◆ improve the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the nursery and school in order to share effective practice and impact more positively on teaching and learning; and
- ◆ improve aspects of accommodation as identified in the report.

### **What happens next?**

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Janie McManus  
HM Inspector

23 October 2007

## **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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
Structure of the curriculum	very good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good
<b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b>	
Meeting pupils' needs	very good
<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents and the community	very good
<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Self-evaluation	good

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



excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths, 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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Their children enjoyed school and were treated fairly.</li> <li>◆ Staff made them feel welcome and showed concern for the care of their children.</li> <li>◆ Staff informed them of the standard of work they expected from their children.</li> <li>◆ The school was well led.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The school buildings needed improved.</li> <li>◆ A few wanted more information about the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils.</li> </ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ They enjoyed being at school.</li> <li>◆ Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were having difficulty with their classwork.</li> <li>◆ Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could.</li> <li>◆ The school helped to keep them safe and healthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>
<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Staff were very positive about all aspects of the school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>

## **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/>.

### **HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management Unit, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail [HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk). A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/>.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: [ask@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: <http://www.spsso.org.uk/>.

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## **Footnotes**

1 Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.