

St Mary's Primary School Hamilton South Lanarkshire Council

22 June 2010

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, children and the local community know whether their school² provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which children are involved. We also gather the views of children, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well children are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support children. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/>. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from children, parents and staff. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals.

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1. The school

St Mary's Primary School is a denominational school. It serves the central area of Hamilton in South Lanarkshire. The roll was 275 when the inspection was carried out in April 2010. Children's attendance was above the national average in 2008/2009. The school moved to temporary premises on another site in Hamilton in January 2010 in order to allow a new school building to be completed over the course of the next two years.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Happy, confident, and well-behaved children.
- Children's achievements, including high levels of attainment in English language and mathematics.
- Very positive relationships between all members of the school community.
- Staff teamwork and their high level of commitment to improving learning.
- Leadership of the headteacher.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

The welcoming school ethos provides a supportive learning environment where children feel happy, safe and nurtured. Relationships across the school community are very positive and there is a strong sense of mutual respect. Children are polite, well behaved and proud of their school and their achievements. They cooperate very well with each other when they work in groups or pairs. Children are focused, motivated to learn and complete tasks carefully on their own. In most lessons they engage enthusiastically in their learning. Children should continue to develop a clearer understanding of their individual strengths and what they need to do to improve.

Children broaden their learning and achievement through a wide range of out-of-class activities. A number of children, both as individuals and as teams, have been successful in competitions, including sporting events. This is developing their confidence and sense of wellbeing. They participate in trips to places of interest. Examples include the transport museum in Glasgow, Loch Lomond, the Scottish Parliament and the David Livingstone Centre. These trips help children to develop their awareness of the local and wider area in which they live. Children have a very good understanding of healthy living. They take seriously their responsibilities as members of the school community. They are developing skills as responsible citizens by taking on roles, for example, on the pupil council and the eco, health and Fairtrade committees. They raise significant sums of money for a wide range of charities. They have a good understanding of their role as global citizens and

contributed enthusiastically to the recent 'UNICEF Day for Change'. They are developing confidence as they take part in a range of opportunities for performance, both to their peers and wider audiences. The school should continue to build on the effective tracking of participation and learning in out-of-class activities and achievements to ensure appropriate skills development and progression in learning for all children.

Children are making very good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Over a number of years the school has maintained high standards of attainment. Almost all children have attained appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics and many do so earlier than normally expected. A few children do not maintain the early gains as they progress through the school. In English language, children are developing effective skills in listening and talking. They listen attentively to explanations and instructions from their teachers. They listen very well to other children and can build on each other's ideas. By P7, they read fluently and with understanding and can discuss their favourite authors. Children write accurate and interesting pieces of work for a range of purposes. In mathematics, most children display confidence at their level in both written and mental calculations. Children have a secure understanding of the properties of shapes. They can use an appropriate range of strategies to solve mathematical problems. Children with additional support needs are making good progress in their learning.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Children enjoy a broad curriculum which develops their skills well. The school is making good progress to improve children's experiences, taking account of *Curriculum for Excellence*. This includes developing further approaches to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Staff plan activities to develop children's personal, social and citizenship skills very well. Children's learning benefits from a range of outings and visitors to the school. Regular homework is set and children enjoy the challenging homework tasks which involve their parents working alongside them. The school is working hard to overcome the restrictions of the building presently occupied, preventing regular access to information and communications technology. Although children benefit from good quality physical education they do not all have two hours each week. Whilst reviewing the curriculum, the school should continue to ensure it is flexible enough to build on the prior learning of all children. Transitions from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Holy Cross High School are effective.

Across the school, staff meet almost all children's learning needs through well-planned learning experiences. Teachers share the purposes of lessons with children and give clear explanations. Most tasks are set at an appropriate level but do not always make children think deeply enough about their learning. The school has effective approaches for identifying, monitoring and supporting those children with additional needs. Children with individualised educational programmes and additional support plans have appropriate

learning targets which are regularly reviewed with parents. Classroom support assistants provide children with effective encouragement and support.

4. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

The school has strong partnerships with parents. The Parent Council is active in supporting the work of the school in a range of ways. This includes raising funds to support various school activities. Parents receive regular newsletters and informative reports about their children's progress. They are consulted on sensitive aspects of health and relationships in their children's education. Almost all parents think the school helps their children to become more confident and think their children's learning is progressing well. Children benefit from a range of partners being involved with the school and offering support when needed, for example, the educational psychologist, speech and language therapist, nurse and hearing impairment services. Business partners are involved in several activities, including judging competitions, presenting at the annual awards ceremony and at the world of work week, which enhance children's learning. The school has strong links with St Mary's Parish and the wider community of faith. They work together in promoting shared values and citizenship within the community. At the current time there are no complaints. Parents and children are happy that any complaints are dealt with effectively by the school.

5. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

Staff work well to improve their practice for the benefit of children. They undertake a range of activities both in school and beyond to support their professional development. They are committed to reflecting on their practice and evaluating new initiatives, ideas and changes they have introduced. They work very well together and regularly share ideas informally. The headteacher and depute headteacher visit classes to observe learning and provide staff with useful feedback. The school has effective systems for gathering the views of staff, children and parents. The school acts on the findings to inform improvement planning. Children enjoy taking responsibility across the school. The pupil council take their responsibilities seriously and discuss issues, such as, homework and aspects of the new school building. Children at P7 act as buddies and young leaders to support younger children. The eco committee is involved in a range of activities which encourage a 'greener' approach in a range of ways. This work has been important in the school gaining its Eco-Schools Scotland green flag award. The school has also been successful in gaining a gold Health Promoting Schools award and a bronze award for international education.

6. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

Children feel safe and cared for at school. They are confident that any incidents of bullying will be handled well. Children feel that staff pay attention

to what they say. Staff work hard to promote positive relationships across the school. They have high expectations of children's attainment, attendance and behaviour. Children have high expectations of their own behaviour. They are polite, courteous and supportive of each other. The school has an appropriate policy for child protection and staff know their roles and responsibilities in this area. The school is active in encouraging children to make healthy lifestyle choices. Children's achievements are celebrated regularly through assemblies, awards and displays. Children have regular opportunities for religious observance. They understand the importance of respect for others and value the strong sense of community promoted by the school's Roman Catholic values.

7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The headteacher provides very effective leadership and is highly committed to the wellbeing of children and staff. She knows all children very well. She is highly respected by staff and parents. There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff. They work well together in a professional and personally supportive manner. They meet regularly to discuss how to improve the work of the school and are willing to take forward new initiatives. The headteacher, along with the depute headteacher and principal teachers, is well placed to take forward plans for the continuing focus on improving learning and teaching in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

8. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to develop the curriculum, taking account of *Curriculum for Excellence* and the principles of personalisation and choice and relevance.
- Continue to increase children's ownership of their learning.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for St Mary's Primary School.

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Carol A McDonald
22 June 2010

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

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Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation, or if you wish to comment about any aspect of our inspections. You can contact us at HMIEnquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/> or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Where the school has a nursery class, you can contact the Complaints Coordinator, Headquarters, Care Commission, Compass House, Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY, telephone 0845 603 0890.

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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.
 2. The term 'school' includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate.
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