



**St John's Primary School
Blackwood
South Lanarkshire Council
24 August 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 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.

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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1. The school

St John's Primary School is a denominational school. It serves the villages of Blackwood, Coalburn, Kirkmuirhill and Lesmahagow. The roll was 61 when the inspection was carried out in May 2010. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2008/2009.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Well-behaved, polite and friendly children who are keen to learn.
- Staff teamwork leading to improvements in the school.
- High-quality artwork.
- Partnerships with parents, agencies and the wider community which have improved learning.
- Leadership of the headteacher.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Across the school, relationships are very positive and children feel valued. They feel safe and well cared for in school. Teachers are increasing ways for children to be involved actively in their learning. They make good use of the outdoor environment to enhance learning. As a result, children are enthusiastic and well-motivated learners. Children collaborate well with each other when completing activities in pairs and groups. They enjoy assessing their own and each other's work. Children are more confident when talking about what they are learning in class. They are ready to be more involved in planning their work and agreeing what they need to do next to improve their learning.

Children achieve very well across the school. They take part in a broad range of sporting, art and community activities. They have a very good understanding of sustainability and, as a result, have achieved a green flag from Eco-Schools Scotland and 'Fairtrade' accreditation. Children achieve success in a number of after-school

activities, including football, Irish tin whistle and fitness programmes. Across the school, children are developing a very good understanding of how to keep fit and eat healthily. They grow food in their community garden and cook the produce. They have responsibilities through their involvement in the Health, Eco and Fairtrade committee (HEF) which incorporates the pupil council. Children are developing sound citizenship skills through fundraising for a range of charities. In art and design, children create very high-quality artwork using a range of different media. For example, children took outstanding digital photographs of plants and wildlife linked to their project on 'Developing a Wildlife Garden'.

Almost all children achieve appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and mathematics, and most do so in writing. Across the school, children can listen well, follow instructions appropriately and can talk confidently about personal experiences. Almost all children enjoy reading and can identify their favourite author and other features of books. They particularly enjoy their work on Scots language. They write well for different purposes and in different styles across most curricular areas. Teachers are increasingly providing relevant contexts for writing which is increasing children's motivation and enjoyment. In mathematics, almost all children are confident and successful in using numbers. They handle information well and can confidently use computer packages to display information. Children are able to solve problems in mathematics but would benefit from more opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff have made very good progress in implementing aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence* and are becoming familiar with the experiences and outcomes. They are planning ways for children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in other areas of their learning. Children are becoming more involved in planning and developing their learning, for example, through mind-mapping activities. Staff provide well-planned opportunities for children to develop their skills in enterprise education and the world of work, for

example, in their eco activities and business links. The school's programmes for religious and moral education and personal and social education provide very good opportunities to promote aspects of equality and diversity. All children receive two hours of good quality physical education each week.

Staff know the children very well and are sensitive to their needs. They create a very caring ethos. Teachers, support and specialist staff and other professionals work very effectively together to support children with additional needs. Staff support vulnerable children and their families very well. They give clear explanations and share the purpose of lessons with children. They are developing skills in explaining what they expect children to learn. Staff should ensure that tasks and activities are at the right level to challenge all children, particularly those who are higher achievers. The pace of learning could be brisker in some lessons. Homework activities are appropriate and set regularly.

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

The school has been very successful in developing effective links with parents, support agencies and local businesses. The recent 'Community Garden' project involved a wide range of participants from the school and community in a variety of activities to develop this environmental and learning resource. The St John's Partnership Group, which incorporates the Parent Council, supports the school very well. The school has very strong links with the Parish of Our Lady and St John's. The school communicates effectively with parents through, for example, newsletters and written progress reports. Parents feel information provided by the school, and the 'drop in' sessions about *Curriculum for Excellence* are helpful. The school consults parents about sensitive health matters and deals effectively with any complaints. Arrangements for children moving from nursery

to P1 and those moving from P7 to Holy Cross High School are well planned.

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

Children take a very active role in improving the school community through their responsibilities and roles on the HEF and Partnership committees. Almost all children feel these groups are good at getting improvements made in the school. Children are involved in setting targets to improve their learning. All staff are committed to improving the quality of learning experiences for children. They regularly review their own work and identify priorities for improvement. Staff are becoming increasingly successful in reflecting on their practice and evaluating the impact of new approaches. The headteacher uses a range of ways to gather information to improve the work of the school. She reviews teaching plans, carries out classroom visits and looks at children's work. She provides teachers with helpful feedback on learning and teaching. Staff use this feedback to improve children's learning experiences.

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

The school is welcoming and has a positive ethos. Roman Catholic values are at the heart of the school. Children are polite and very well behaved. The school places a high importance on celebrating success. Children feel school assemblies and displays are used well to recognise their achievements. All staff know what to do to keep children safe and well. They are aware of child protection procedures. They monitor children's attendance carefully. Teachers could involve children more in understanding what they need to do to improve their work. Children are developing a sound understanding of fitness and how to have a healthy lifestyle. As a result, the school has achieved gold status as a Health Promoting School. Children have good

opportunities to participate in religious observance and worship through regular assemblies and visits to the local church.

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

The headteacher provides highly-effective leadership. She provides the school with a clear sense of direction. She has managed change well and, along with staff, has a clear vision of what is needed for future improvements. She is highly respected by staff, children, parents and the wider community. Across the school, staff take opportunities to take leadership roles to improve learning. They are committed to taking the school forward and work very well as a team. The school is well placed to improve further.

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.

- Ensure that tasks and activities across the curriculum meet the needs of all children.
- Continue to support children to identify their next steps in learning and to take greater responsibility for their own 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 John'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	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Peter Gollogly
24 August 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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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 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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