

**St Mary's RC Primary School
Dundee City Council
25 April 2006**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	1
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils supported?	3
6. How good is the environment for learning?	4
7. Improving the school	5
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	8
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	9
How can you contact us?	10

1. Background

St Mary's RC Primary School was inspected in January 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 Mary's RC Primary School is a denominational school serving the Lochee and surrounding areas of Dundee. At the time of the inspection the roll was 319, including 43 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils attendance was slightly below the national average. The school monitored pupils attendance closely and had worked successfully with families to improve attendance rates.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils understanding of the importance of healthy eating and an active lifestyle.
- The quality of pastoral care, sense of school community and the caring and committed staff.
- Partnerships with the parent-teacher association, parents, the church and the community.
- Effective transition arrangements from the nursery to P1 and from P7 to S1.

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

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

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

Parents and staff were very positive about all aspects of the school. They thought that children enjoyed being at school. They felt that staff encouraged children to work to the best of their ability and showed concern for their care and welfare. Parents agreed that school reports gave helpful information and that staff made them feel welcome. All felt that the school was very well led and had a very good reputation in the local community. Pupils were very satisfied with the work of the school. Almost all pupils thought that teachers explained things well, told them how learning could be improved and helped them if they were having difficulties. Pupils felt safe in school and recognised the importance of being well-behaved. Staff liked working in the school and were very positive about all aspects of their work. They felt that there was a strong sense of community and teamwork.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils learning experiences and achievements

Teachers provided pupils with a broad and generally well-balanced curriculum. Teachers made good use of the programme for environmental studies to ensure continuity and progression in the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. The schools active approach to the teaching of health education provided pupils with a very good understanding of healthy eating and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Ongoing developments in the teaching of personal and social education, enterprise education, citizenship and writing were leading to improvements in the quality of pupils learning. Specialist teachers for drama, music, physical education and art and design provided a very good level of support to teachers and provided pupils with purposeful learning experiences. The quality of teaching was good and there were some examples of very good teaching. Teachers made effective use of questioning and discussion to reinforce teaching points and check pupils understanding. In the most effective lessons, teachers involved pupils actively in lessons by sharing learning intentions and providing useful feedback on their progress. Teachers were starting to make more effective use of assessment information to identify and plan the next steps in learning. However, their plans lacked detail and they did not always provide enough information on what pupils were expected to learn. Teachers issued homework regularly to support pupils learning but the tasks and activities lacked variety.

The quality of pupils learning was good. Almost all pupils listened attentively, took part in discussions, offered opinions and responded well in class. Most pupils worked with the minimum of supervision to complete tasks set by the teacher. Pupils from P1 to P3 were developing an effective range of literacy and numeracy skills. They had opportunities to learn through play but the activities lacked challenge. Pupils were starting to apply their information and communications technology (ICT) skills in a variety of practical ways using computers, digital cameras and multi-media equipment to enhance their learning. In a few classes, pupils worked well together in pairs and groups. However, pupils skills in taking responsibility for their own learning or working together and learning from each other were not well-developed. The quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of work was not of a consistently high standard in all classes.

Pupils were developing self-confidence and were becoming responsible and effective citizens. There was a strong sense of community in the school and pupils were actively involved in deciding how to make the school better through the pupil council. The school was working towards Eco School status and pupils were currently involved in practical energy saving activities such as recycling waste paper. Pupils concern for others was also demonstrated through the schools ongoing achievements in fundraising for a range of charities. In some classes, pupils had good skills in enterprise education because of their involvement in well-organised class projects. Pupils at all stages were developing an interest in sports by taking part in an extensive range of lunchtime and out-of-school activities. They were actively involved in school performances and events such as the annual Christmas performance. Almost all P7 pupils took part in an annual residential visit and learned important personal, social and sporting skills.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. In recent years, the school had maintained a consistent standard of attainment in talking, listening and reading and most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. The majority of pupils were attaining the appropriate national level in writing but this was an area for development at whole-school level and there was evidence that attainment was increasing. Pupils coped well with coursework but a small number of pupils at each stage were capable of achieving higher standards, particularly in writing. Those who experienced difficulties with aspects of reading and writing were making steady progress in their learning. By P7, most pupils could talk about their favourite authors and discuss the main ideas in books. Across the school, most pupils listened attentively, spoke with confidence and took an active part in class and group discussions. Pupils in P7 had good opportunities to read within the school day but very few read widely for pleasure at home. Pupils could write for a variety of purposes and audiences but there was scope to extend their writing skills.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. In recent years, the school had maintained a consistent standard of attainment. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels. Pupils coped well with their classwork, however some were capable of achieving higher standards and tackling more challenging tasks. Those who experienced difficulties with aspects of mathematics were making good progress in their learning. Across the school, pupils' number skills were very well-developed and pupils were good at carrying out mental calculations. By P7, pupils could confidently interpret information from a range of graphs and charts and were developing appropriate skills in using computers to handle information. They had a good knowledge and understanding of the properties of shapes. At all stages, pupils could use a range of strategies to help solve mathematical problems. However, their skills in choosing the most effective strategy to solve particular problems were limited.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The schools arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils were very good. The caring and committed staff knew pupils and their families well and were responsive to their social, emotional and physical needs. Staff had a clear understanding of the schools procedures for child protection, the administration of medicine and for dealing

with instances of bullying. They were successfully implementing a range of approaches to reward positive behaviour and had explained this initiative to parents. Pupils felt safe in school and knew who to speak to if they had any concerns. The school took appropriate account of national advice and guidance from the diocese on dealing with subjects such as personal safety, substance misuse and relationships.

Teachers selected an appropriate range of tasks and activities to meet the learning needs of pupils in reading, mathematics, religious and moral education and the expressive arts. However, the choice of activities in writing and environmental studies did not always provide sufficient challenge to meet the needs of all pupils. Staff provided good support to pupils who were experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning. Senior staff met regularly with health personnel and support agencies to ensure that the specific needs of individuals were addressed, including pupils with care plans. The active schools coordinator worked successfully with teachers to promote sporting activities and encourage pupils to take part. The early intervention nursery nurse worked effectively with P1 pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The depute headteacher coordinated support for pupils very well. Learning support staff had worked closely with teachers to identify pupils requiring support and produce individualised educational programmes (IEPs). The IEPs contained clear learning targets which were shared and discussed with parents. Where appropriate, learning support staff should work with teachers to extend the number of IEPs.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good. The two separate buildings were spacious and well-maintained. The headteacher made very good use of available school finances to maintain and upgrade the buildings. Teaching areas were bright and spacious and pupils work was attractively displayed. Teachers had made very creative use of additional space within each building to create a number of stimulating areas for learning such as the computer suite and library areas. The interior of the building was kept very clean and appropriate security arrangements were in place for each building. Disabled access was limited, particularly in the P4-7 building.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and pupils were proud of their school. The headteacher and staff had successfully created a caring and supportive environment in which pupils felt valued, safe and secure. Relationships among staff and pupils were very good. Almost all pupils were polite and well-behaved. Teachers' expectations for pupils attainment in English language and mathematics were good. Daily prayers, weekly assemblies and church services provided regular opportunities for staff and pupils to worship together and highlight individual achievements. The school actively promoted equality of opportunity and a sense of fairness. The school had recently introduced new resources and developed aspects of the curriculum following a racial awareness audit. P7 pupils had taken part in a successful anti-sectarianism event to raise their awareness of the need for tolerance and respect within communities.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The headteacher encouraged parents to support their children's learning in school and at home. The parent-teacher association was very supportive and actively involved in organising social events and fundraising activities. The headteacher produced informative newsletters and helpful educational leaflets. He organised regular curriculum evenings and worked closely with nursery staff and secondary school teachers to ensure a well-planned and smooth transition from nursery to P1 and from P7 to S1. The headteacher surveyed parents' views and used the schools newsletter to give helpful feedback to parents. He consulted parents about programmes and resources for sensitive health issues. Working in partnership with the health assistant and catering staff, the school had provided parents with useful information about school lunches and healthy eating. Parents met staff twice each year and received good written information about their children's progress. The school had very good links with the chaplain and the church. School performances and events were well supported by parents and the local community.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

St Mary's RC Primary School provided a caring and supportive learning environment in which most pupils were making good progress in their learning. The quality of learning and teaching was good. Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics was good but there was scope to improve attainment in writing. In most curriculum areas, tasks and activities were generally well-suited to meet pupils' needs but teachers' plans did not always contain enough detail about what pupils were expected to learn. The school had the clear capacity to ensure ongoing improvement and was well-placed to take forward its development priorities.

The experienced headteacher provided good leadership. He was held in high regard by staff, pupils, parents and the community. He showed a strong commitment to pupils' education, personal development and well-being. The headteacher and depute headteachers formed an effective team. The depute headteacher with responsibility for the early stages provided good support for staff and pupils. A new depute headteacher had been appointed immediately prior to the inspection and the headteacher was preparing to review the remits of the senior management team. The headteacher used a wide range of approaches to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The headteacher and depute headteacher evaluated teachers plans, sampled pupils work and provided written feedback to staff. The procedures to track pupils' attainment and monitor their progress in English language and mathematics needed to be developed further. The headteacher had started to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching and provide feedback to teachers. He worked closely with staff to evaluate the school's work and identify improvement priorities. He produced an informative annual standards and quality plan and kept parents well-informed about school improvement priorities.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take account of the need to:

- make more effective use of assessment information to build on pupils learning and ensure that activities provide sufficient challenge for all pupils;
- improve pupils' attainment in writing; and
- extend opportunities for pupils to work together and take greater responsibility for their own learning.

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. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Michael Wood
HM Inspector

25 April 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	Good
The teaching process	Good
Pupils learning experiences	Good
Pupils attainment in English language	Good
Pupils attainment in mathematics	Good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Very good
Meeting pupils needs	Good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	Good
Climate and relationships	Very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	Good
Equality and fairness	Very good
Partnership with parents and the community	Very good

Improving the school	
Leadership	Good
Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities	Good
Self-evaluation	Good

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.

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents were very satisfied with all aspects of the school's work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly and expected them to work as hard as they could. • They helped them when they were having difficulties and told them when they were doing well. • They got on well with other pupils and felt safe and well cared for. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were positive about almost all aspects of the schools work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

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 Director of Education, 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, Wellgate House (Level 5), The Wellgate, Dundee DD1 2DB or by telephoning 01382 224155. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you wish to comment about primary inspections

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

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. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at 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. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

Crown Copyright 2006

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.