

**St Margaret's Primary School  
Polmont  
Falkirk Council  
14 June 2005**

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## **1. The inspection**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on Standards and Quality in St Margaret's Primary School in April 2004. Working with the school, the education authority prepared and made public an action plan in June 2004 indicating how they would address the main points for action identified in the original HMIE inspection report published in April 2004.

An inspection team revisited the school in March 2005 to assess the extent to which the school was continuing to improve the quality of its work, and to evaluate progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report.

## **2. Continuous improvement**

The school had built on the key strengths identified in the inspection report and had made steady progress in addressing the main points for action. The education authority had provided the school with strong support. The quality improvement manager had liaised closely with the headteacher in preparing and monitoring the action plan and had observed and reported on the quality of learning and teaching in nearly all classes. The headteacher of a neighbouring school had provided peer support and advice. The authority had also provided advice on extending effective approaches to learning and teaching in the early stages into the middle stages.

The school had significantly improved communications with parents and carers. Successful workshops on aspects of the curriculum, particularly language, mathematics and support for learning, had taken place. Arrangements for the entry to P1 of children with significant additional support needs had been improved. Parents and carers were informed when their children had successfully attained a higher level as part of the 5-14 programme. Parent and carer helpers provided teachers with strong support in classrooms and in the wider life of the school.

The percentage of pupils who achieved expected national levels of attainment in English language and mathematics for their stage had improved in 2004 and was above the local authority and national averages.

Links with the community were strong and pupils regularly entertained parents and carers and community groups. The annual Burns Supper was a particular highlight. Pupils' involvement in charity work and environmental projects contributed to the development of their skills in citizenship. Pupils from the school had been extremely successful in a general knowledge quiz sponsored by the Rotary Club, winning the local competition in 2004 and 2005, and gaining third place in the national final in 2004. All pupils were engaged in activities to develop valuable enterprise skills. The programme of extra-curricular activities was being extended through, for example, the introduction of debating for P7 pupils.

### **3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action**

The initial inspection report published in April 2004 identified six main points for action. This section evaluates the progress made with each of the action points and the resulting improvements for pupils and other stakeholders.

#### **3.1 Improve the overall structure and quality of the curriculum.**

The school had taken a number of promising steps to improve the structure of the curriculum. A staff group had been established to review existing arrangements. Guidelines on the allocation of time given to each curricular area had been amended. Additional time continued to be allocated to language and mathematics. The guidelines were sufficiently flexible to permit varying time allocations for different stages and to allow teachers to adjust the timetable where necessary for specific purposes and promote more effective learning.

Staff should continue to review the effectiveness of the curricular and timetable structures to ensure the arrangements fully support effective learning and teaching and improved attainment.

#### **3.2 Establish greater consistency in the quality of learning and teaching.**

The school had made substantial progress in addressing this point for action but the full impact had yet to be confirmed. A working group had been formed under the leadership of a deputy headteacher resulting in a number of very promising initiatives. An extensive programme of staff development, with a particular focus on the use of assessment to promote further learning, had been implemented and staff were consistently applying appropriate techniques at all stages.

The staff development programme had contributed to an increase in the range of teaching approaches being employed in all classes. Personal learning plans had been introduced for all pupils, developing their ability to evaluate their work and to set targets for their own learning. Commendably, staff met each month to share and spread good practice.

At all stages pupils interacted more positively with their teachers and with each other through, for example, paired and group work. In most classes, particularly in the upper stages, pupils were more independent and responsible for their own learning. Writing was strong in the upper stages. Pupils produced appropriate levels of work in early years and in upper stage classes. However, staffing problems impacted on the continuity of learning and teaching in the middle stages, particularly in P4.

An information and computer technology (ICT) working group had been established and teachers were encouraged, through their forward plans, to use ICT to support their teaching. While good use was being made of the ICT suite, the cramped nature of much of the school's accommodation made it difficult for teachers to use ICT fully.

Significant progress had been made to develop learning through play in the early years. A full and thoughtful policy had been prepared and clear links had been established with the 3-5 curriculum.

The work being done to develop greater consistency in learning and teaching was having a positive effect on improving pupils' experiences. Staff should continue to take forward these very promising initiatives and to monitor their impact on attainment.

### **3.3 Continue with plans to improve the provision for support for learning.**

Considerable initial progress had been made to strengthen the school's arrangements for support for learning. The appointment of a part-time teacher with responsibility for additional support needs had made a particular impact. The school's principal teacher had successfully focused on improving the arrangements to support learners. Procedures and arrangements for the preparation and maintenance of individual learning plans and records of need had been improved. Arrangements were monitored through regular staff meetings. Systematic and structured liaison took place between class teachers and the additional support needs teacher. The additional support needs teacher and the principal teacher also contributed to the continuity of support when pupils transferred from the nursery stage and moved on to the secondary school. Support staff were deployed more effectively to support learning. An appropriate programme of staff development had also contributed to the increased capacity of all staff to meet pupils' needs.

### **3.4 Improve the deployment of senior managers and support staff.**

Senior managers had recently introduced a range of strategies and attended a number of useful staff development courses to develop their individual and collective effectiveness.

The potential effectiveness of the two able and highly regarded depute headteachers was being restricted by the heavy time demands of covering for staff who were on long term absence. Support staff were now deployed more effectively by the principal teacher and the additional support needs teacher and were making strong contributions at all stages.

Arrangements were being made to regularly review the remits of senior staff and to ensure there was sufficient emphasis on school improvement. Although sound beginnings had been made, there was scope for continued improvement in the effectiveness of senior staff.

### **3.5 Ensure the senior management team involve staff more effectively in planning and implementing developments.**

A number of initiatives had been undertaken to strengthen and extend staff involvement in planning and contributing to improvements. All staff participated in working groups to review and revise a range of policies and procedures. Staff had contributed to the preparation of the school development plan. Their views had been sought through a variety of audits and meetings on a range of issues. Staff were being more fully consulted and involved in school improvement. Staff morale had improved and there was a greater sense of collective purpose and teamwork. Senior managers should continue to engage all staff in discussions on learning and teaching and on ways of improving attainment.

### **3.6. Address the accommodation issues raised in this report, as resources permit.**

There had been limited progress in addressing the accommodation issues. Despite several delays, the new gym hall was now nearing completion. However, accommodation in the main building remained cramped and, in some case, hampered effective teaching and learning. Plans had been prepared to carry out internal reconstruction including removal of all but one of the intrusive internal staircases. Displaced classes will be accommodated in additional temporary classrooms.

The exterior of the existing hutted accommodation continued to be in poor condition.

## **4. Conclusion**

Overall, the school, assisted by the education authority, had made a promising start in improving key aspects of its work and in addressing the main points for action in the inspection report. Staff had been effective in improving the quality of learning and teaching. Arrangements for support for learning had been strengthened considerably. Staff were more positive about planning and communication and were making individual and collective contributions to school improvement.

The school and the education authority should continue to take forward these promising developments and ensure that they contribute to improved pupil attainment. HMIE will continue to engage with the education authority and the school to support and monitor progress with improvement. The education authority should submit a report to HMIE by the end of February 2006 on the school's progress in overtaking the main points for action and continuous improvement. Thereafter, HM Inspectors will make a further visit to the school and report to parents and carers of progress made.

Ian Ronald  
District Inspector

14 June 2005

## **How can you contact us?**

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, T1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 2917. Copies are also available on our website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **If you wish to comment about follow-through inspections**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of follow-through inspections, you should write in the first instance to Margery Browning, Acting HMCI, 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 600265 or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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