

**St Thomas RC Primary School
Keith
The Moray Council
14 June 2005**

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1. Background

St Thomas RC Primary School was inspected in March 2005 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 parents association (PA), and a group of parents. There was no School Board.

St Thomas RC Primary School is a denominational school serving the town of Keith and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 68, including 12 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.

The nursery class was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Commitment of all staff, quality of teamwork, and productive partnerships with the local Church, parents and the wider community.
- The quality of pupils' experience in environmental studies, science and technology.
- Links with schools abroad, including the use of information and communications technology (ICT).
- Pastoral care linked to arrangements to assist pupils with additional support needs.

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

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

Parents and carers were very positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school. About a fifth felt that the school did not deal effectively enough with

inappropriate behaviour. A few complained about incidents of bullying, but others spoke very highly about the school's efforts to promote positive behaviour. Pupils were disappointed at incidents which involved name calling and teasing, and a few felt that playground supervisors did not take their complaints seriously enough. However, after discussion with pupils and observation of them in classes and at play, no significant cause for concern was identified. All staff enjoyed working in the school and thought that it was well led. A few support staff did not feel sufficiently involved in the decision-making process.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall structure of the curriculum was good. The school should reconsider the distribution of time to provide opportunities for more challenging activities. Additional time allocated to English language and mathematics was not sufficiently focused on raising attainment and sustaining improvement. The use of ICT did not permeate the curriculum sufficiently throughout the school or develop pupils' skills progressively. The overall quality of teaching was good. Teachers used whole class teaching to good effect. Group and individual work was well judged and appropriately organised. Teachers gave clear instructions and good explanations. They used questioning skilfully to reinforce work and to recall what had been learned previously. They set appropriate homework tasks to consolidate and extend class work. However, they needed to share the objectives of lessons more systematically to ensure that pupils were fully aware of what was to be learned, and why. Teachers gave good attention to developing pupils' skills in mental calculation. They used praise effectively to motivate and encourage pupils.

Most pupils responded well in class and participated eagerly in lessons. They listened attentively to teachers and classmates, and contributed appropriately and effectively to discussions. Pupils did not have enough opportunities for structured play at the early stages. Overall, the pace of work needed to be improved. At all stages, pupils' skills in movement and in physical fitness were well developed through good lessons in physical education. At the middle stages they were acquiring good racquet skills. Pupils experienced a very good environmental studies topic on Pakistan, which was enhanced by video-conferencing and exchange of written information with a school in Lahore. An e-mail link with a school in France increased pupils' awareness of life there and of the French language. Very good practical work in science, including many interesting experiments, developed pupils' understanding of scientific principles and processes. At the upper stages, pupils made very good use of ICT to access information and to communicate with pupils in other schools overseas.

The pupil council included representatives from P4 upwards. Older pupils acted as representatives for those from P1 to P3, consulted with them and spoke effectively on their behalf. The council had made significant suggestions for improvement in the working of the school. It had instigated the redecoration of the pupils' toilets. Overall, pupils had a good understanding of what to do to keep fit. Almost all participated enthusiastically in vigorous playground games, which were well supervised by auxiliary staff. Many pupils had achieved success in music-making and in local

athletics competitions. Older pupils benefited from a well-organised residential stay which helped to foster their independence and social skills. The school's successful enterprise activities ensured that pupils had a good understanding of the world of work. The very strong links with the local Church, and the school's significant fund-raising efforts, helped to develop pupils' awareness and appreciation of others, perhaps less fortunate than themselves.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was fair. However, in the previous and current sessions, standards showed signs of improvement. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. Overall, pupils' attainment was below appropriate national levels in reading and writing. Pupils listened attentively in class, and almost all enjoyed and appreciated listening to stories. The majority showed good recall of what they had heard and responded appropriately to questions. Most spoke confidently, and many could participate in lengthy discussions on a good range of topics. Many pupils had developed positive attitudes to reading and read regularly for pleasure. At the upper stages a few showed good appreciation and understanding of both prose and poetry. At all stages, they did not have enough opportunities to write at greater length, or to develop more independence in their writing. Pupils' written work contained too many errors in spelling and in presentation.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Although attainment had fallen in previous years, there had been a recent improvement in P4-P7. The majority of pupils at all stages were achieving appropriate national levels. A few pupils exceeded them. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. While most pupils at the upper stages interpreted graphs well, at the early and middle stages their ability to display and interpret information was not well developed. At all stages, pupils were acquiring good skills in mental calculation. They were accurate when undertaking straightforward numerical operations. At the upper stages they showed a good understanding of the links between fractions, decimals and percentages. They also had good knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shapes. At all stages, pupils were developing appropriate skills in problem solving. They tackled mathematical problems with confidence and could effectively use a range of strategies.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare arrangements were very good. Staff dealt appropriately with pupils' concerns and worries. They knew their pupils very well, and were very understanding of their individual needs and circumstances. Procedures for child protection were effectively implemented. Pupils were secure and content in the school. All staff provided a very good level of support for pupils' personal and social development. Arrangements for counteracting bullying were effective, and any incidents of bullying were dealt with promptly and efficiently.

Teachers made a good choice of tasks to support pupils' learning. The support for learning teacher carefully identified pupils' needs through frequent discussions with class teachers.

She made a very good contribution to pupils' progress, largely through her very effective work with small groups. She offered pupils a good range of activities and provided good practical contexts to support the development of literacy and numeracy. Staff had prepared well-planned individualised educational programmes for some pupils. Classroom assistants gave very high quality support and showed very good initiative in their work with pupils. Overall, pupils received good support from outside agencies when necessary. The school had good arrangements to support the transfer of pupils from the nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation was good. Corridors and classrooms were enhanced by the high quality displays of pupils' work. The buildings and grounds were very well maintained, and provided a good environment for learning. Resources were plentiful and well organised. In particular, there were very good resources for science and technology, facilitating practical activities in classes. There was good provision of ICT equipment, which was effectively used to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils benefited from good playground facilities and playground games, and from a well-maintained sensory garden. The library was well stocked and well used, and included an electronic index of authors and titles. Security arrangements needed to be reviewed.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	The school provided a very welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment. Staff and pupil morale was high, and relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Pupils were very polite and well behaved. They had a well-developed sense of respect for, and tolerance of others, and were respectful of adults. They cooperated well in class and supported one another very well. Staff and pupils showed a strong sense of pride in their school community. Regular masses in the adjoining church provided very good opportunities for pupils to worship together. They were reinforced by daily devotions and by weekly assemblies, which also celebrated pupils' achievements. Pupils responded very positively. Teachers had high expectations of behaviour and fairness, but expectations of attainment were not always high enough.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had very good links with parents and carers, the wider community and the local Church. Communication between school and home was of very high quality. Monthly newsletters gave important information in a very accessible way, as did the school's standards and quality reports. Annual written reports to parents gave good information on pupils' progress and on the steps which they needed to take in order to improve. The PA was very supportive, and had made significant financial contributions to the school through its fund raising activities. Parents were regularly consulted about aspects of the school's work, including personal relationships and sensitive issues. Their opinions were valued and acted upon. There were good links with the local secondary school, and productive contacts with external agencies to ensure appropriate and effective support for pupils. Parents and volunteer helpers assisted in classes, with extra-curricular activities and with out-of-school visits. The local parish priest offered very good assistance and support through his regular visits to the school, where he helped teachers in several areas of the curriculum.

7. Improving the school

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

The school provided a very caring environment. All pupils were valued. Staff worked very effectively to promote fairness, tolerance, equality and respect for others. All pupils were fully involved in the life and work of the school. The overall quality of teaching was good. Staff were mutually supportive and worked well together as a team. Standards of attainment were fair in English language and good in mathematics.

The school was well led. The headteacher was dedicated and committed to the work of the school and the parish. His relationships with pupils, parents and staff were very good. He had established and maintained an effective school community, in which all were valued. Staff ensured that pupils with additional support needs made appropriate progress in their learning. He had reviewed curricular programmes to improve pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics. Staff recognised that continued improvement in these areas was of major importance. In consultation with staff, the headteacher had reorganised classes in mathematics to allow pupils of similar ability to be taught together in order to increase challenge. There were weaknesses in the arrangements for evaluating the work of the school. The headteacher had monitored teachers' work by visiting classes and by using nationally agreed quality indicators, but the programme of formal class visits had lapsed. Although he had frequent discussions with staff and visited classrooms on an informal basis, the process of monitoring was

not rigorous enough. Staff did not use quality indicators systematically enough to evaluate their own work and to identify a clearly focused agenda for improvement. With appropriate attention given to monitoring and self-evaluation, the school's capacity to improve was good.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve achievement and security in the school. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve attainment in English language and mathematics;
- ensure progression of skills in ICT;
- improve the school's processes for self-evaluation in order to increase the pace and challenge of learning; and
- address security arrangements in the school.

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

Robert E McKinstry
HM Inspector

14 June 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Partnership with parents and the community
- Equality and fairness

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Accommodation and facilities
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Leadership

We judged the following to be fair

- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's reputation in the community. • The information which they received on their children's progress and the level of consultation between school and home. • Teachers' standards for attainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective ways of dealing with inappropriate behaviour.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers knew them very well and expected them to work as hard as they could. • The school's efforts to keep them safe and healthy. • The fact that teachers listened to what they had to say. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A better approach to dealing with incidents of alleged bullying. • Improvement in the behaviour of some pupils.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of communication. • Pupils' enthusiasm for learning. • Standards of behaviour and the school's approaches to dealing with indiscipline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few ancillary staff felt that they could be more fully involved in decision making.

How can you contact us?

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