

**St Joseph's RC Primary School
Dundee City Council
16 October 2007**

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1. Background

St Joseph's RC Primary School, Dundee was inspected in June 2007 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 innovation, and its 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 the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the Parent Staff Association (PSA) and a group of parents¹.

The school is a denominational school serving an area of Dundee. At the time of the inspection the roll was 276, including 12 pupils in a resourced location for pupils with additional support needs. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- A very positive school ethos.
- The sustained emphasis on pupils' personal and social development and the recognition of their wider achievements.
- Very successful approaches to promoting equality and fairness throughout the school, including respect for cultural diversity.
- High levels of concern for pupils' care and welfare shown by staff.
- Strong links with parents and the local community, including the school's Roman Catholic faith community.

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, pupils and staff were very positive about all aspects of the school. Parents appreciated the school's good reputation and felt that their children were being well cared for and well educated. They were pleased at the quality of communication they received and were confident that the school would respond effectively to any concerns they raised. Pupils liked going to school and were happy with their teachers. They felt safe, well looked after and fully involved in the life of the school. Staff felt that they were well led. They thought that communication in the school was effective and that relationships with the school's senior management were very good.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The quality of the curriculum was adequate overall. It was broad and balanced at most stages. Additional time was allocated to the reinforcement of pupils' language and mathematics skills, including the recent introduction of the education authority's literacy hour initiative. However, there was insufficient coherence in approaches to developing pupils' reading, listening and writing skills and over emphasis for higher-attaining pupils on reading comprehension exercises. There were insufficient opportunities for active learning through play at the early stages. There was an appropriate programme for the development of pupils' information and communications technology (ICT) skills. The school was working steadily towards the introduction of two hours per week of physical education for all pupils. The emphasis on pupils' personal and social development included a residential experience for P7 pupils. The quality of teaching was good overall. Lessons were well prepared and thorough. There was an appropriate range of teaching approaches across the school, including direct class teaching, paired, group and individual approaches. Teachers shared learning intentions consistently with pupils and reviewed learning on a regular basis. More pace and impact in some lessons was required, with better questioning to probe pupils' understanding of important ideas and to stimulate their imagination. There was an appropriate planned approach to homework.

Pupils were well behaved and motivated and keen to learn. In most classes they responded well to the opportunities for collaborative learning, including the emphasis on paired work and evaluation of each other's work. Most pupils worked diligently throughout lessons, although in a few classes more stimulating learning was required. Pupils at all stages were capable of productive, independent working without sustained supervision. They responded well overall to the opportunities for class discussion, particularly in science lessons at P2 and P5. They also appreciated the attractive displays created by teachers, for example in the history theme at P4/P5. The pace of pupils' learning was uneven, however, and needed to be increased at several stages. Pupils would benefit from more opportunities for active learning, particularly at the early stages. Increased levels of challenge and responsibility were required to stimulate higher-attaining pupils in English language and mathematics at the middle and upper stages. The use of ICT as a medium of teaching and learning needed to be extended.

The school took very good steps to develop pupils' wider achievements, through an exceptional range of activities for pupils, within the school and the wider community. Pupils' confidence and teamworking skills had benefited from being provided with many areas of responsibility for aspects of school life. The pupil council and the new

Eco-group played useful roles in leading the school's charity activities and improving the environment. In addition, a P7 pupil management team was developing pupils' leadership and management skills in a wide range of contexts. The team was successfully coordinating the efforts of older pupils in helping others in the school and playground and in offering their talents to lead sporting, musical and other activities. Senior pupils responded well to the opportunities to share their skills with others, for example in the dance and cheerleading classes. P2, P3 and P7 pupils displayed very effective teamwork in keeping the playground tidy. Pupils in the resourced location were accompanied by their fellow pupils when participating in local disability festivals and sports. Many pupils participated with significant success in a very wide range of sporting, musical and drama activities within the school and in Dundee.

English language

Attainment in English language was good overall. It had remained steady over the last three years. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. At P2, P6 and P7 a significant number were attaining these levels earlier than might be expected. Most pupils at the early stages were developing appropriate early literacy skills. Pupils with additional support needs were making steady progress from their prior levels of attainment, but higher-attaining pupils were capable of achieving more, particularly in writing. Pupils were articulate and confident in talking for a range of purposes. They expressed their views well in class and group discussions. Most were able to listen to instructions and for information. At all stages, pupils read accurately and with good comprehension. They were interested in books and authors, but were less familiar with the ways different writers achieve their effects. Pupils at all stages were capable of writing for a range of purposes. Their potential achievement was reduced, however, by the limited range and variety of writing tasks at some stages. The quality of personal and imaginative writing was too variable.

Mathematics

Attainment in mathematics was good. It had improved steadily over the last three years. Most pupils were achieving appropriate levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. All pupils at P2, and some by P6 and P7, were now achieving these levels earlier than might be expected. Pupils with additional support needs made good progress from their previous levels of attainment, but higher-attaining pupils were capable of achieving more. At all stages, pupils could create and interpret a range of graphs. Those at the upper stages had had experience of using databases to collate and handle information. Throughout the school, pupils were developing sound skills in mental and written calculation. However, they had had limited opportunity to practise skills in a variety of practical and cross-curricular contexts. By P7, pupils had a good understanding of the relationship between fractions and decimals. Most could tell the time and use units of measurement accurately. In shape, position and movement, they could identify accurately two- and three-dimensional shapes and discuss their properties. Across the school, pupils required more experience of solving mathematical problems and of discussing the strategies they could use.

Personal and social education

The quality of pupils' learning and personal and social development in the resourced location was good overall. Pupils were building on their personal and social skills through a range of planned opportunities. They were successfully adapting to routines and using skills in a social context, during snack time, through shared activities in class and through using ICT skills. All pupils joined their peers in the school for playtimes, lunchtimes, assemblies and other whole-school activities which supported their improving self-esteem and confidence. Pupils from P7 joined those in the resourced location for "golden time" activities. In technology activities, pupils made choices and took responsibility for design and materials.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were good. Overall, teachers matched tasks and resources appropriately to pupils' abilities and aptitudes. However, across the school, higher-attaining pupils required a faster pace of work and a wider range of challenging activities. Effective procedures were in place to identify pupils who required additional support. Learning support staff provided useful advice to staff and valuable support for pupils with additional learning needs. In consultation with class teachers, they had prepared appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) and shared these with parents. Most pupils with IEPs were making good progress towards meeting their learning targets. Throughout the early stages, cooperative teaching between learning support and class teachers was leading to more effective early identification and intervention to support pupils' learning. The involvement of learning support staff in teaching targeted sets at P5 was having a positive impact on the whole-school approach to raising attainment in mathematics. Class teachers, support assistants and visiting specialists provided good support for pupils with additional support needs, including those for whom English was an additional language.

The quality of the curriculum in the resourced location was good. Pupils' IEPs set out clear targets with criteria for success. These plans were shared with parents. An appropriate range of learning opportunities was in place for the range of pupil needs. For example, the learning environment for pupils had been improved through installing individual learning stations, good use of visual timetables and social stories. A structured approach to listening and talking was effective in developing pupils' communication and language skills. Regular use of newspapers was building on functional literacy skills. Pupils enjoyed developing their mathematical skills in handling money and recognising size, colour and shape in the everyday context of a supermarket. Successful opportunities to join mainstream classes were carefully planned for individual pupils.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>All staff were committed to the care and welfare of pupils. They knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to their physical, emotional and social needs. Staff were clear about child protection procedures. There were appropriate arrangements for developing pupils' understanding of health issues. Pupils showed care and concern for each other and older pupils effectively supported those younger than themselves.</p> <p>Procedures and routines for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils, including the prevention of bullying, were effective and well established. Pupils were clear about the processes for raising concerns. The school strongly supported healthy lifestyles. This initiative was enhanced by the healthy tuck shop and health week event. The school had effective arrangements to support pupils entering P1 and those transferring to St John's High School after P7.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of the accommodation was good. Teaching areas were well equipped and of suitable size. There was a good range of additional facilities, including a gymnasium/hall, a well-resourced library and an ICT suite. There were well-planned facilities for pupils within the resourced location, including a quiet room. Interior weaknesses included some water leaks, damp plasterwork and the need to renovate some classroom windows. The school made very effective use of available space. There were appropriate entrance security arrangements. The building was not easily accessible to disabled users, but the education authority had plans to improve entrance and toilet facilities. There were suitable outdoor play facilities. The education authority had taken action to cordon off part of the playground due to falling masonry from an adjacent property, although the issue remained a concern for parents.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Both were very proud of the school and happy to identify with it. Pupils behaved very well. Staff expectations of pupils' work and behaviour were high. Assemblies were used very well to provide a sense of school community, to welcome new pupils and to acknowledge pupils' many personal achievements. There were regular and well-planned opportunities for religious observance. The approach to promoting equality and fairness was very good. The strong culture of inclusion, shared by staff and pupils alike, included the sharing of experiences with pupils in the resourced location. There was a clear race equality policy. There were sensitive arrangements for supporting the faiths of pupils who were not Roman Catholic. The school was addressing successfully equality issues, within the curriculum.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had established strong partnerships with parents and the wider community. Parents were kept well informed about school activities through newsletters and termly leaflets about curriculum topics. There were appropriate arrangements for consulting parents on sensitive health issues. Pupil reports did not always convey information about pupils' progress clearly enough, however. The school was well supported by its active PSA, which assisted with fundraising and a range of school activities. Plans were well advanced for the transition from the School Board to the Parent Council. There were regular links with adjacent non-denominational primary schools, including participation in sport and an anti-sectarian project. There were strong links with the local church, where monthly masses were led by classes in turn. Members of the local community were invited to school concerts and performances. The school participated in fundraising for the Scottish Catholic International Aid fund.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

St Joseph's RC Primary School served its pupils and community well. The ethos of the school was very positive. The commitment of pupils and staff to equality and fairness was a particular strength. Pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics was good overall, but there was scope for increased challenge to allow high-attaining pupils to fulfil their learning potential. The opportunities for personal and social development

were encouraging a very good range of broader achievements on the part of pupils. The quality of teaching was good overall, as were the strategies to meet the needs of the wide range of pupils. Pupils with additional support needs, including those in the resourced location, were particularly well supported.

The school was well led. The headteacher had worked hard to establish and maintain its high reputation with parents and the wider community. She had succeeded in improving levels of attainment in English language and mathematics over a number of years. She had gained the confidence of her staff, through her personal support and her commitment to building up the positive ethos of the school. She had been strongly supported by her depute headteacher, who had worked well in her short period in post to establish effective teamwork with staff and lead staff in the education authority's *Learning Together in Dundee* initiative. The headteacher and depute headteacher met members of staff on a regular basis, to discuss teachers' plans and to monitor the progress of pupils. The school had appropriate systems for monitoring and tracking the progress of pupils in relation to national attainment levels. The senior management team observed the quality of teaching and provided feedback to staff. The processes were not applied with sufficient rigour, however, to have had a clear impact on improving the quality of teaching. More systematic monitoring of pupils' learning across the school in relation to designated priorities, such as writing, was also needed. Staff had been involved in the development of the comprehensive school improvement plan, but more manageable targets were needed to allow effective prioritisation of future developments.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve the curriculum, teaching and learning and quality assurance. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- develop the curriculum further, to improve the coherence of the English language programme, improve levels of attainment in writing and increase opportunities for active learning;
- increase the pace of learning and levels of challenge for higher-attaining pupils, particularly in English language and mathematics; and
- improve the rigour and impact of self-evaluation and monitoring arrangements.

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.

L MacCallum
HM Inspector

16 October 2007

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	adequate
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good
Pupils' attainment in Personal and social development (Resourced location)	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	good
Self-evaluation	adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school had a good reputation in the community. • Staff made them welcome in the school. • Their children were treated fairly. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. • The school responded to concerns they raised. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being at school. • Teachers explained things clearly. • They felt safe and well looked after. • Teachers knew them well and encouraged them. • Pupils were treated fairly and had a say in how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was effective communication between senior managers and staff and among staff. • They had good opportunities to be involved in decision making. • Senior managers operated effectively as a team. • Time for continuous professional development was used effectively. • They liked working in the school. • The school was well led. 	<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, 1st Floor, Endeavour House, 1 Greenmarket, Dundee, DD1 4QB or by telephoning 01382 576700. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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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 (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@sps.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.sps.org.uk.

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