

**St Vincent's RC Primary School
and Nursery Class
Dundee City Council
11 March 2008**

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1. Background

St Vincent's RC Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in November 2007 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and 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 the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, and a group of parents¹.

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

St Vincent's Primary School is a denominational school serving an area in the north east of Dundee. At the time of the inspection the roll was 262, including 12 pupils with complex support needs in the Resourced Location and 50 children in the nursery class. The headteacher had recently retired. An acting headteacher and depute had just been appointed. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was just below the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Examples of very effective teaching, particularly in mental mathematics.
- Pupils' positive behaviour and application to their work.
- Staff commitment to ensuring the care and welfare of pupils.
- Supportive partnerships with the Parent Council, parents and the local community.

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

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.

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. In discussions, parents were very satisfied with the attention given to the care and welfare of their children. They thought teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and the school dealt effectively with pupils' inappropriate behaviour. Pupils felt that teachers praised them when they had done something well and helped them when they were having difficulties. They thought teachers were good at telling them how they were getting on with their work. Around half of pupils in P4 to P7 expressed concern about the behaviour of a few pupils. All staff liked working in the school. They felt pupils' successes were celebrated regularly and senior managers worked effectively as a team. A few felt there could be more opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

In the nursery, staff provided a safe and welcoming environment for learning. They promoted children's independence and social skills well at the snack table and encouraged them to choose healthy foods. Children chose independently from a range of resources and activities. However, some activities lacked sufficient challenge. The overall quality of the primary school curriculum was good. There was a strong focus on the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Pupils' citizenship skills were developing well through a range of whole-school enterprise and Eco-school activities. Visiting specialist teachers of physical education, drama, art and design and music enhanced pupils' experiences. There was appropriate breadth and balance in the curriculum in the Resourced Location. The school was working well towards providing two hours of good quality physical education weekly for all pupils. Recent improvements to the literacy programmes had been successful in promoting positive attitudes to reading and writing in a variety of contexts. The planning and assessment of listening and talking was not sufficiently consistent to ensure continuity and progress in pupils' learning. Teachers allocated additional time to developing pupils' numeracy and literacy skills. The ways in which this additional time was used did not always motivate pupils to learn or improve their attainment. In the school as a whole, teaching approaches had some important strengths. Staff in the nursery interacted well with children to extend their play. Teachers gave clear explanations and made good use of praise to build pupils' self-confidence and reward their achievements. There were examples of very effective interactive teaching, particularly in reading, mental mathematics, physical education and drama. Most teachers were skilled in using questions to check pupils' understanding. They shared with pupils what they were expected to learn from their lessons, especially in writing. In a few lessons, teachers did not make consistent use of questions to extend pupils' responses. Teachers did not consistently encourage pupils to ask questions or share with others what they had learned. Homework tasks were set regularly but were not always sufficiently varied.

Children in the nursery took part enthusiastically in singing games. They were able to use a microphone to perform their own songs and actions. Many played imaginatively in the home corner, acting out how firefighters put out a fire in the kitchen. They were learning to balance, climb and throw and catch balls. The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences at the primary stages was good. Pupils were well behaved, hardworking and enthusiastic in their learning. Across the school, almost all pupils were able to work with the minimum of supervision. They were able to apply themselves effectively in a range of learning situations, including when working in pairs and groups. Pupils responded very well when cooperating with others on a range of practical activities, including solving mathematical problems, physical education and drama activities. In many classes, pupils acted as learning partners to support one another in writing activities. The pace of learning was not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for higher-achieving pupils. Pupils, particularly at the upper stages, were not encouraged to take sufficient personal responsibility for their learning, for example, in the promotion of good health. Across the school, there was a need to promote more independent learning.

The school took good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Across the school there were stimulating displays of pupils' art work and the achievement board was used effectively to celebrate their successes. The pupil council was beginning to be involved in decisions which influenced the life of the school but there was scope for further development of this involvement. A whole-school enterprise week successfully promoted team-building skills, independent learning and creativity. Pupils' confidence and sense of achievement were developing well through their participation in the Rotary youth games, and a local arts festival and theatre company. Pupils in the Eco-school committee were planning improvements to the playground area and had introduced new litter bins to encourage pupils to care for the environment. Older pupils took responsibility for others by looking after pupils at P1 and children in the nursery. Pupils at P7 were involved in an annual residential experience which successfully encouraged their social and outdoor skills. A good range of out-of-class activities provided effective support for pupils' sporting skills in areas such as basketball and football. Pupils in the Resourced Location demonstrated care and empathy for one another. They were keen to discuss their achievements with visitors. Across the school, nursery children and pupils regularly held fundraising events such as toy sales and talent shows and contributed to a variety of charities. This had developed their understanding of the needs of others.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their communication and language skills. Staff interacted very well to encourage children to respond. Most listened well to adults' instructions and responded appropriately to stories, songs and music. They were able to take part in short conversations. Some experimented with written marks to express their ideas. They could recognise their name. Some could write letters and their own and others' names. They used talk well during role-play in the home corner. Children did not always make sufficient use of the good range of books in the nursery. The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language at the primary stages was good. Attainment over the past few years had remained stable. Despite a slight dip in the previous session, there were signs of improvement. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. Pupils requiring additional support with their learning were making appropriate progress. Pupils at the early stages were making very good progress in developing their literacy skills, particularly in reading. Across the school, pupils listened attentively in class to teachers' explanations and

instructions and were keen to respond. They spoke confidently about their personal experiences. However, by P7, their skills in group discussions were less well developed. Pupils at all stages read fluently and with good expression. They were able to find information from a variety of resources. At most stages, pupils wrote well for a range of purposes across the curriculum. From P4 to P7, pupils needed to be supported more effectively to produce more extended writing and higher standards of spelling.

Mathematics

In the nursery, children were making good progress in their early mathematics skills. They were able to count simple numbers in singing and rhyming games. They used appropriate mathematical language when involved in water play, for example when investigating the water-holding capacity of pots. Children could recognise shapes and colours in the playroom. They did not experience sufficient investigation and solving simple mathematical problems in their outdoor play. The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics at the primary stages was good. Standards of attainment had remained steady over recent years. Despite a dip in the previous session, there were signs of improvement in the current year. Most pupils were achieving appropriate levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. Pupils requiring additional support with their learning were making appropriate progress. By Primary 3, almost all pupils had attained or exceeded appropriate levels earlier than would be expected. This progress was not sustained fully from P4 to P7. Across the school, pupils were able to handle information effectively. At P4, pupils were able to effectively collect, display and interpret information about the forthcoming toy sale in the school. At all stages, information and communications technology was increasingly used by pupils as an integral tool to support their learning in mathematics. Most pupils could identify a good range of shapes and describe fully their properties. Pupils' skills in written calculation were developing well. They were confident and accurate in mental calculations, particularly at P7, and were able to discuss fully the methods they used. In problem solving, pupils could identify effectively a range of strategies but had difficulty in applying these in practical contexts.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Staff in the nursery class supported children well and were sensitive and responsive to the needs of individuals. They assessed children's progress regularly and effectively. The timing of group activities at the end of the session did not always meet all children's needs well and these activities lacked sufficient challenge for some children. The school's approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were good. Most pupils were well supported in classes by appropriate tasks and a good range of stimulating resources such as interactive whiteboards. The organisation of groups for mathematics in a few classes did not always take sufficient account of pupils' individual learning needs. A few higher-attaining pupils within classes were insufficiently challenged. A significant number of staff provided effective support for pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning. Staff prepared individualised educational programmes (IEPs) but learning targets were not always sufficiently focused on pupils' needs. The school had good links with education authority services such as bilingual support, behaviour support and the educational psychologist. There were effective arrangements to support children moving from nursery to P1 and from P7 to St Saviour's High School.

Staff in the Resourced Location had a very good understanding of the significant additional support needs of pupils. The caring and committed principal teacher and staff took full account of the emotional needs of the pupils. Pupils were able to use computer programmes effectively to support their learning. Each pupil had an IEP but learning targets were often too broad to enable staff to robustly monitor pupils' progress. Staff needed to plan more collaboratively with mainstream colleagues to ensure effective inclusion throughout the school for pupils with additional support needs.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	Staff were very committed to ensuring pupils' care and welfare. They knew pupils well and were responsive to their personal, social and emotional needs. They were familiar with the school's child protection procedures and followed these appropriately. Pupils felt confident in the school's arrangements for dealing with any incidents of bullying. They could readily discuss confidential matters with the approachable acting headteacher and staff. Staff followed clear procedures for the administration of medicines and first aid. The school's health and personal and social education programmes promoted pupils' health and well-being effectively. School staff worked well with catering staff to encourage pupils to make healthy choices at lunchtime.
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good. The school building was appropriately secure. The interior was in need of redecoration and minor repair. Nursery playrooms and classrooms were spacious and well used, particularly in infant rooms. Staff had created additional well-resourced teaching areas for computing, reading, art and music. The large playground provided ample space for pupils to play and relax. Access and facilities for users with restricted mobility were appropriate on the ground floor, although the steep stairs on the upper floors posed a potential hazard. Pupils' and staff toilets required upgrading.

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>The atmosphere in the school was friendly and welcoming. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Pupils were friendly and proud to be associated with the school. Pupils' achievements, both in and out of school, were celebrated at school assemblies. Teachers had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attendance but did not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils could achieve. Pupils had respect for staff and each other. The school provided regular opportunities for religious observance through daily prayers, weekly assemblies and special masses which promoted a community of faith. Staff took care to involve all pupils in the life of the school and successfully promoted tolerance and respect for others through their health and religious and moral education programmes. Pupils had some understanding of religious diversity and the school was developing its approaches to promoting race equality and to helping pupils recognise and tackle discrimination. Further consultation with pupils would have a positive effect on their understanding of inappropriate behaviour.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The school had a very positive partnership with its supportive Parent Council. Parents provided very good support through fundraising and helped regularly with outings. The recent nursery toy sale had been well supported and had successfully raised funds for charity. Parents had attended a helpful open afternoon at the school to observe their children at work. Parents received helpful yearly written reports on their children's progress. Staff effectively used homework diaries to enable parents to comment on their children's learning. Parents were suitably consulted on potentially sensitive curricular issues, for example, relating to sexual health and personal relationships. Links with the Church and community were productive and supportive. Pupils' performances for the local elderly residents' home, Dundee Repertory Company, school concerts and fundraising enhanced the school's reputation in the local and wider community.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

The school provided a caring and supportive learning environment. Teachers were hardworking and committed to providing a quality education for all pupils. Pupils' attainment in reading and writing showed signs of improvement, although there was a need to raise attainment further in some respects, including in mathematics at the middle and upper stages. Teachers did not always ensure that tasks and resources matched pupils' needs effectively, particularly those of higher-achieving pupils. As a result, some pupils did not make sufficient progress in their learning.

In her short time in post, the acting headteacher had provided stability in leadership and maintained good relationships with staff, parents and the local community. She had led staff in developing planning and teaching resources to further encourage pupils' reading skills. She liaised closely with parents and support agencies to ensure the needs of many pupils were well supported. The acting depute headteacher was hardworking and committed to the school. Senior managers' remits were not yet sufficiently clear, especially in supporting pupils' learning needs. More effective monitoring and evaluating of the wide range of support provided would be beneficial in helping to further raise attainment. The principal teacher fulfilled her remit enthusiastically and conscientiously. Staff valued her support and advice highly. Staff used their expertise and skills well to support pupils' learning and their contributions were highly valued by the acting headteacher. However, they had little scope to develop and apply their own skills in leadership for learning. Planning for improvement was not monitored systematically to ensure that there was a positive impact on pupils' learning experiences. The school's approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of its work had some important weaknesses. Arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress did not focus enough on teachers evaluating learning and teaching and setting clear learning targets to raise pupils' attainment. Pupils were not sufficiently involved in discussing their own progress and agreeing individual learning targets. More systematic monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment and greater involvement of nursery staff, teachers, pupils and parents in evaluation of school performance will build the school's capacity to improve its work.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection there were six recommendations and two requirements. All had been addressed satisfactorily.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve learning and meeting needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- encourage more independence in pupils' learning;
- further improve the coordination of support for learning to meet pupils' needs more effectively;
- develop leadership for learning across the school; and
- improve the school's approaches to self-evaluation to impact on pupils' 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.

June Graham
HM Inspector

11 March 2008

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' 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	good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership across the school	good
Self-evaluation	weak

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"> • Children enjoyed being at school and found work stimulating and challenging. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children and there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. 	<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"> • Teachers explained things clearly and gave them assistance when they were having difficulty. • Teachers praised them when they had done something well and told them how they were getting on with their work. • They enjoyed being at school and felt safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the behaviour of a few pupils.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff liked working in the school and felt the school was well led. • Senior managers worked effectively as a team. • Standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • Pupil success was regularly celebrated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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