

**St Francis' RC Primary School
and Nursery Class
The City of Edinburgh Council
2 September 2008**

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1. Background

St Francis' RC Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in May 2008 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 and representatives of the Parent Council, and representatives of the wider community, including the local clergy and a group of parents¹.

St Francis' RC Primary School and Nursery Class is a denominational school serving an area of east Edinburgh. At the time of the inspection the roll was 218, including 29 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 below the national average. The school was being relocated at the end of the session with staff and pupils moving to a new campus, shared with Niddrie Mill Primary School.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Positive and purposeful learning experiences for children in the nursery class.
- Happy, friendly primary pupils and their engagement in the life and work of the school.
- Strong partnerships with parents and the wider community.
- The success of all staff in providing nursery children and primary pupils with high quality pastoral care and promoting a caring, inclusive and welcoming ethos.
- Leadership of the headteacher and her commitment to continuous improvement.

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 the nursery class and the primary school. Parents thought that staff made them feel welcome and that the nursery class and the school had a very good reputation in the community. Parents of children in the nursery class welcomed opportunities to be involved in the life of the nursery, for example, as parent helpers. Parents felt that their children liked being at school. Pupils reported that they enjoyed being at school and that they got on well with other pupils. They felt that their teachers explained work clearly and helped them when they were having difficulties. A few pupils believed that the behaviour of other pupils could be better. All staff liked working in the school and were very positive about the pupils and school community. They felt that the school celebrated pupils' achievements well.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Learners' experiences

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. Staff in the nursery and primary classes provided a range of varied experiences for children which were interesting and helped them make good progress in their learning. The use of play was being developed at the early stages in primary to support pupils' learning. Across the primary stages, all staff placed an appropriate emphasis on health promotion and pupils participated enthusiastically in an annual health week. Staff had successfully introduced a programme of activities to raise pupils' confidence and enable them to express their feelings appropriately. The school was making progress towards providing two hours of high quality physical education (PE) for all pupils each week, in line with national recommendations. Staff had begun to develop the use of information and communications technology (ICT) across the curriculum. They used visits to places of interest, including the theatre, to enhance the curriculum. They did not develop pupils' skills in listening and talking systematically enough. Pupils at all stages made good progress in French and Italian. The overall quality of teaching was good with some examples of very effective practice. In the nursery class, the quality of interaction between staff and children was very high. Staff successfully used a range of approaches to engage and motivate children. This good practice was less consistent in the primary classes. At all stages in the primary, teachers gave clear explanations and instructions and used praise well to motivate pupils. They shared consistently the aims of lessons and reviewed with pupils what they had learned. Almost all used questioning well to check pupils' knowledge and understanding. In a few very effective lessons they used questioning to stimulate pupils' deeper thinking. Teachers set appropriate homework tasks to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. They provided pupils with appropriate feedback and clear targets for improving their writing. There was scope to develop this effective practice in other curricular areas. Not all teachers used ICT well to develop and enhance pupils' learning.

In the nursery class, there were major strengths in children's learning experiences. Children were happy, settled and secure in the playroom routines. They played very

well together and shared their toys with each other. They organised the resources they needed for activities independently and moved confidently between the playroom and the outdoor area. Children contributed well to discussions and talked enthusiastically about activities in the nursery class. The quality of pupils' learning experiences in the primary classes was good. Almost all pupils were motivated and attentive and responded positively to opportunities to share ideas and suggestions. Overall, they cooperated well with their teacher and worked successfully together in pairs and small groups. A few pupils, however, did not always work well without close supervision and this occasionally affected the learning of others. In a few lessons the pace of learning was too slow and, as a result, pupils' progress was limited. At all stages, staff provided pupils with feedback on their learning so that they could take responsibility for improving their work. A range of visiting teachers and visitors enhanced the curriculum and contributed very positively to pupils' learning experiences. Visits by an American author and some Maasai warriors, for example, supported pupils' understanding of different cultures.

Improvements in performance

The school had successfully improved its performance in a number of important areas. Overall, this amounted to a good improvement in performance in the nursery class and in the school.

In the nursery class, children were making good progress in communication and language. They had very good opportunities to talk and share their ideas in small groups, and many spoke confidently. Many showed an interest in books and enjoyed having stories read to them. Several children could write their name and recognise alphabet sounds. Children used the writing table well and had good opportunities to write for a range of purposes in play contexts.

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language across the primary stages was good. In recent years, pupils' attainment in reading and writing had improved overall. The school's recent focus on writing was developing further the quality of pupils' writing. Teachers should continue to develop opportunities for pupils to write at length. The majority of pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Many pupils at the early stages achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected in reading. Pupils who required support for their learning, including those with English as an additional language, were making good progress. Across the school, almost all pupils listened well to instructions and directions from teachers. Many expressed their thoughts and feelings well and could support a point of view clearly and confidently, particularly at P6 and P7. Overall, they were less skilled when participating in group discussions. At P7, most pupils could discuss effectively the characters and plot of books they had read. At all stages, they had a sound understanding of different writing styles and were developing writing for a range of purposes across their learning. Standards of punctuation, spelling and presentation of written work were consistently high across the school.

In the nursery class, children were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. They enjoyed simple counting games and puzzles and many were developing good skills in sequencing. Most children could sort, match and count. They had good opportunities to use mathematical ideas in play contexts.

In the primary classes, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was sound and improving. The majority of pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment. Most pupils at P3 had attained such standards earlier than might normally have been expected. Staff needed to ensure that such gains were maintained. Pupils with additional support needs, including those for whom English was an additional language, were making appropriate progress in their learning. A few pupils, notably at the middle stages, were capable of learning at a faster pace and achieving higher standards. Across the school, pupils achieved highly when they worked together in groups and engaged in practical mathematical activities. At all stages, they had conducted surveys and displayed effectively the information in graphs. They interpreted graphs and charts well. Throughout the school, pupils' use of ICT, for example to display and organise information gathered from a survey, was limited. Most pupils performed well in written calculations and were developing a good understanding of money and measurement. Pupils at P7, for example, learned to use stop watches as part of their Mini Olympics activities in PE. However, pupils' mental agility, for example in prompt and accurate recall of multiplication facts, and their skills in using fractions were less well developed. Their knowledge of symmetry and the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes was sound. At all stages, pupils were developing appropriate skills in problem-solving and enquiry and most could solve problems and discuss the approaches they used.

In the nursery and primary classes, children enjoyed using a wide range of materials and techniques in art and craft. They used collage materials to create interesting pictures. In the nursery class, children used props imaginatively in the "home corner". Many enjoyed listening to songs and using percussion instruments to create sounds. Children were learning about seasonal changes in springtime. Most used ICT confidently to develop their early literacy and numeracy skills. Children had very good opportunities to develop control of their fingers and hands by using scissors, small construction materials and pencils. Most children rode wheeled toys skilfully and many were becoming increasingly confident in climbing, sliding and balancing while using large physical equipment. At the primary stages, staff in P1 had begun to consider more active approaches to learning to ensure continuity of approach between the nursery class and the primary school. Pupils worked well in groups to explore the properties of materials when building houses as part of a topic on the three little pigs. At all stages, pupils engaged in tasks which allowed them to work together and learn from each other, including in drama and PE. They spoke and sang enthusiastically in Italian and French. In the most successful learning experiences, pupils used ICT, including, for example, working with digital photography and preparing multimedia presentations.

The school successfully encouraged nursery class children and primary pupils to develop their wider achievements. In the nursery class, children were making very good progress in sharing and taking turns. They cooperated very well with each other and were becoming increasingly independent. Their planting and caring for a small garden contributed positively to the school environment. At the primary stages, pupils were actively involved in planning for their new school through the pupil council. They had worked with architects and with pupils at Niddrie Mains Primary School to contribute to plans for the shared campus. Throughout the school, pupils were developing awareness of diversity and global citizenship through their links with a school in Tanzania. A range of activities,

including a school show, contributed to the development of pupils' confidence, performance skills and working with others to solve problems. Pupils willingly took on responsibilities, for example, as monitors and class helpers, and leading presentations at assemblies. Through the work of the eco committee, pupils had begun to develop a greater awareness of environmental education issues. At all stages, they had contributed successfully to promoting healthy lifestyles and were actively engaged in working towards school accreditation for health promotion.

The school had made good progress overall in overtaking the priorities in its improvement plan. Several of these had had a positive impact on the experiences of children in the nursery class and pupils across the primary stages. For example, nursery class staff had worked with parents to engage them actively in the nursery class and in home activities to improve the learning experiences of their children. Teachers in primary classes had successfully introduced a range of approaches to develop pupils' understanding of their emotions and improve their learning. They had worked together to develop consistent approaches to providing feedback to pupils on their strengths and areas for development and sharing with them what they needed to do to improve. As a result, pupils had greater responsibility for learning successfully. The school knew itself well and staff were focused on continuing improvement.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

In the nursery class, staff met children's learning needs very well. They knew children very well and took careful account of their needs and interests when planning activities. Children with additional support needs were ably assisted by both nursery staff and support assistants. In most lessons across the primary classes, teachers set well-judged and interesting tasks and activities to develop pupils' learning. Teachers' expectations for the amount of work pupils produced were inconsistent. At all stages, teachers shared assessment information with pupils to help them understand their strengths and how to improve. The school had very well organised systems to identify pupils with additional support needs and to intervene with support programmes. Throughout the school, including the nursery class, staff developed additional support plans and individualised educational programmes for those children who required them. Overall, these contained appropriate long- and short-term learning targets and were reviewed regularly to ensure children were making good progress. For a few pupils in primary, some of the learning targets were not sufficiently specific. Staff had developed close links with other agencies to provide support for pupils. The specialist assistance of visiting staff for pupils with additional support needs, including those for whom English was an additional language, helped them to make appropriate progress. Support staff provided very effective assistance for individuals and groups of pupils. The school did not always allocate support staff to classes efficiently and the impact of their support was on occasion limited.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of nursery class children and primary pupils had major strengths. All staff placed a high priority on ensuring pupils' emotional, social and physical wellbeing. They knew pupils and their families well and were committed to working with them to create a climate of mutual respect and confidence. They followed established procedures relating to pupil safety, including anti-bullying, attendance checks, Internet safety and child protection. Effective links with a wide range of agencies enabled staff to deal sensitively with the needs of vulnerable pupils. Pupils felt safe and well looked after and knew what to do if they were upset. They were knowledgeable about the importance of healthy lifestyles. Transition arrangements between nursery class and the school were well established. Induction arrangements for pupils at P7 transferring into S1 at Holy Rood High School were well planned and effective.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The headteacher and staff had worked very hard to create a bright and engaging environment for learning. The nursery playroom was very well resourced and stimulating. Outdoor areas were used well for play and mixing with friends. Throughout the school, including the nursery class, staff used high quality displays of children's work and wider achievements to promote high standards and celebrate success. Pupils benefited from a well-resourced library and ICT room. Aspects of the building security arrangements required review and these were drawn to the attention of the school and education authority. Access within the school was not suitable for people with restricted mobility. The education authority had provided a new building and the school was moving to a new campus next session.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness</p>	<p>Pupils, staff, parents and the wider community were very proud of the school and identified strongly with it. Staff worked very effectively to promote the school's values and to ensure that the school had a very welcoming and inclusive ethos. Relationships throughout the school were strong and morale amongst staff and primary pupils was very high. Staff made well-judged use of praise to encourage and motivate pupils. Overall, staff had high expectations of pupils' attendance, behaviour and engagement but they did not all share sufficiently high expectations of pupils' attainment. The school held regular assemblies which provided opportunities for religious observance and worship, and promoting and celebrating pupils' achievement. Pupils developed citizenship skills through taking on responsibilities in the school and community. They delivered Harvest Festival gifts to local residents and learned about the needs of others through a well-established link with a school in Tanzania. The school used successfully a range of approaches to promote and ensure an atmosphere of equality and respect. Staff promoted equality and fairness actively in lessons and through particular aspects of the curriculum, including an understanding of diversity and anti-sectarianism. Pupils felt that their views were valued and that they were involved in making decisions which affected the life and work of the school. The pupil council, for example, had been involved in planning discussions for the new school.</p>

Aspect	Comment
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	Staff had actively developed a range of approaches to include parents and the local community productively in the life and work of the school. Parents and carers were made very welcome in the nursery class and the school. Children benefited from parents' engagement in a range of nursery class activities including visits to places of interest. Parental involvement in the school library promoted reading for pleasure for children in the nursery class and pupils in primary classes. The very supportive Parent Council had worked with the school to contribute to plans for the new school building. Informative newsletters and a helpful school handbook provided parents with information about school activities and their children's progress and achievements. Regular reports and parents' evenings provided opportunities for formal consultation. In the nursery class, staff shared with parents information on their children's progress through written and verbal feedback. The school provided appropriate information to parents about sensitive aspects of health and responsible relationships. Parents knew how to raise any concerns and were confident these would be dealt with appropriately. Members of the local community and clergy, including the parish sister, supported the school very well.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

St Francis' RC Primary School and Nursery Class provided a very caring, inclusive and stimulating environment for learning. It benefited from productive links with parents, other schools and educational agencies, and community organisations. The commitment of all staff to providing high quality pastoral care ensured that children and pupils felt secure, happy and valued. In the nursery class, the quality of children's learning experience was very good and staff met children's learning needs very well. At the primary stages, the quality of teaching and pupils' learning experiences was good and pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics was improving. There was scope to improve attainment further by providing pupils with greater challenge and improving the pace of lessons. The school actively promoted pupils' wider achievements and involved them in decision making.

Leadership had major strengths. The headteacher's ambitions for the pupils and her commitment to them and their families had gained her the respect and trust of pupils, parents, staff and the wider community. In leading improvements, including well-judged changes to the curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning, she had improved pupils' learning experiences. She had consulted and involved all staff effectively in identifying and prioritising improvements and had established successful team working. The principal teacher provided very effective support for the headteacher and staff. She had led a number of whole-school initiatives to improve the quality of pupils' experiences.

This had involved enhancing the school's approaches to supporting and promoting pupils' personal and social development, including developing their confidence and self esteem. Staff successfully used a range of approaches to self-evaluation to identify areas for improvement. The headteacher had taken account of the views of parents, pupils and staff to influence the life and work of the school, for example, in the school's approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles. The headteacher and principal teacher monitored teachers' plans, pupils' work and aspects of learning and teaching and provided helpful feedback. Teachers worked with a partner to identify and discuss good practice. The headteacher and principal teacher tracked pupils' progress. However, this had not led to improvements in the overall pace of learning. The school now needed to ensure that all teachers were more closely involved in evaluating the effectiveness of their work and in improving further the pupils' learning experiences and attainment.

Nursery Class staff were fully aware of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice and were in the process of registering with the Council. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were three requirements relating to employment practices. These requirements had been addressed.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve pupils' learning experiences and attainment, self-evaluation and the leadership role of staff. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- meet the needs of learners more effectively by improving the pace of learning, level of challenge and pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics; and
- involve staff in using self-evaluation to share good practice and develop approaches to improving the school.

What happens next?

As a result of the overall good performance, the sound record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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 the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Eleanor Harkness
HM Inspector

2 September 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?	
The curriculum	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Children's experiences (nursery class)	very good
Learners' experiences (primary stages)	good
Improvements in performance (nursery class)	good
Improvements in performance (primary stages)	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs (nursery class)	very good
Meeting learning needs (primary stages)	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	satisfactory
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	very good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good

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
satisfactory	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 provided helpful information about pupils' progress and how parents could help their children at home. • Relationships between staff and pupils were positive. • Staff showed care and concern for pupils and that their children were treated fairly. • 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"> • Teachers checked their homework and helped them when they had difficulties. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • They made decisions which improved the life and work of the school. • Teachers told them when they had done something well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to improve the behaviour of some pupils.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff worked hard to promote good relations with parents and the local community. • There was effective communication among staff and regular discussions about how to achieve school priorities for improvement. • Pupils were enthusiastic learners and the school celebrated their successes regularly. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

Appendix 3 Good practice

In the course of the inspection, the following aspects of innovative and effective practice were evaluated as being worthy of wider dissemination.

Emotional literacy

The school recognised that a number of pupils had low self esteem and had, on occasion, difficulties in handling relationships appropriately. In line with the school's strong commitment to the care and welfare of children and to inclusion, the school made effective links with staff from a range of agencies and contributed to the development of an emotional literacy programme 'Creating Confident Kids'. The school had piloted this initiative in the nursery and primary classes over the last two years. All children attended emotional literacy assemblies and engaged on related tasks and activities throughout the session. As a result, pupils had developed confidence in expressing and handling their feelings more appropriately and behaviour and relationships within the school had improved.

Place2Be and Place2Talk

As part of promoting healthy lifestyles, the school focused on providing emotional support for pupils. Each session, the Place2Be provided counselling and therapy for up to 12 vulnerable pupils who seemed sad, lonely, angry or shy, or who had emotional or behavioural difficulties. Pupils were identified by staff and the school project manager and parental and pupil agreement was required. The Place2Be provided pupils with an environment where they felt able to express their feelings and concerns safely, counselling sessions nurtured pupils' confidence and independence and pupils felt valued and supported. Parents engaged with the project manager before and after the counselling. The Place2Talk complemented the Place2Be and was established for pupils who required less frequent or intense support. Pupils had responsibility for referring themselves to attend sessions at the Place2Talk. They also valued the emotional support and were more confident. As a result, they felt more secure and engaged in their learning.

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 Children and Families, 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 8293. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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