

**St Francis Xavier's RC Primary
School
Falkirk Council
29 May 2007**

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1. Background

St Francis Xavier's RC Primary School was inspected in February 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 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 Francis Xavier's RC Primary School is a denominational school serving west Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the roll was 502, including 60 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The friendly and supportive ethos of the school and pupils' positive behaviour.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics.
- Staff's high expectations of pupils and pupils' conscientious attitude to learning.
- Pastoral care and attention to the care and welfare of pupils.
- Effectiveness of the headteacher and senior managers in developing strong teamwork across the school.

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 were happy with almost all aspects of the school. Almost all parents were very proud of the school and regarded it as having a good reputation. They felt that teachers set high standards for pupils' learning and the school was well led. Pupils were happy about almost all aspects of school life. Almost all enjoyed being at the school and thought that they got on well with other pupils. A small number wanted better systems to ensure that all pupils were treated fairly. Teachers liked working in the school and were happy with all aspects of its provision. All staff thought that they gave very good care and attention to pupils' welfare. A few support staff wanted more opportunities to contribute to discussions about how to improve the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. The school gave a high priority to developing pupils' skills in English language and mathematics. This had led to improvements in pupils' attainment, particularly in mathematics. Staff promoted healthy lifestyles and diet through a very well-organised health week and through the school's active health group. The Active Schools Coordinator provided further opportunities to improve pupils' fitness through a varied and stimulating programme of physical activities. The time allocated to some physical education (PE) classes at the early stages was too short. Pupils in P1 to P3 had some opportunities to take part in play activities but these did not build well on their earlier nursery experiences and provided insufficient challenge for pupils. All classes were timetabled for information and communications technology (ICT) lessons. Further attention needed to be given to ensuring ICT activities developed pupils' skills across the curriculum. The overall quality and consistency of approaches to teaching were very good. Teachers set high expectations for the amount and quality of work pupils should produce. Strong and respectful relationships between staff and pupils created a positive environment for learning. All teachers used questions well to check pupils' recall of information. In most classes, they questioned further to develop pupils' thinking. In almost all lessons, teachers shared clearly with pupils what they were expected to learn. Teachers skilfully promoted pupils' learning through effective use of discussions which encouraged and valued their contributions.

Pupils were highly motivated to work conscientiously. Most were able to explain what and how they were learning. However, a few were unclear about what they had to do to improve. In most classes, pupils were actively involved in class activities and had opportunities to reflect on their learning and ask questions. Pupils responded positively when asked to share ideas and give feedback on each other's work. Tasks and activities were well structured in most classes to promote learning. However, in a few classes, pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to learn independently or take responsibility for their own learning.

Staff were developing well, the arrangements to build upon pupils' wider achievements.

All pupils participated in the annual Christmas Nativity play and Carol concert. A large number regularly performed in very well-attended school drama productions. An activity week provided opportunities for children to represent and support their house through individual and team sports, a quiz, the poster competition, fancy dress and composing raps and jingles. Pupils were improving their knowledge of global citizenship through successful fundraising events to support SCIAF and LEPR. The headteacher's award scheme celebrated pupils' success and a special display area recognised and celebrated notable pupil successes. Pupils in P7 had recently participated in a week's residential sporting experience.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Attainment had improved consistently over the last few years. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. At the early stages, many were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. The school had recognised the need to review the programme of study in English language to ensure that it more effectively met the needs of able children and those with additional support needs. Pupils at all stages listened well for information and to instructions. They were articulate and were able to participate in discussions, convey information accurately and express their opinions clearly. Throughout the school, pupils were responding very well to the school's initiatives to encourage wider reading. They were interested in books and able to talk with enthusiasm about their favourite authors. Most read accurately and with comprehension. In reading, pupils were developing a good understanding of the author's craft. At all stages, they wrote well and at length for a range of purposes. Pupils responded well to very good feedback on how to improve their writing.

Mathematics

The overall quality of mathematics was very good. Attainment had improved steadily over the past three years and almost all were achieving appropriate national attainment levels by the end of P7. Throughout the school, pupils had carried out simple surveys. At P6 and P7, they were able to interpret accurately a range of graphs. They could use spreadsheets and databases effectively to organise information. At all stages, almost all pupils were proficient in mental calculation and could apply these skills in a familiar context. At P4, pupils had counted and sorted Christmas mail and pupils in P6 had organised and counted votes during class elections. At P7, pupils organised and banked the money that they raised for SCIAF confidently and accurately. At P5 to P7, pupils confidently recognised 2D and 3D shapes and showed a very good knowledge of the properties of shapes at an appropriate level. Pupils in P5 were able to use their knowledge of area to design a school badge. At P1, pupils were learning useful problem solving strategies in an every day context through role play. For example, they matched sets of gloves in the cloakroom. By the upper stages, pupils could work together skilfully and enthusiastically to solve mathematical problems.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Within classes, most tasks and activities were appropriate to pupils' needs. However, in a few classes, teachers needed to employ more support strategies to meet the needs of individual learners. The school had clear and effective procedures to identify the needs of pupils who required additional support in their learning. Pupils with a coordinated support plan and those with an individualised educational programme were making very good progress towards their agreed learning targets. Parents and pupils were appropriately involved in agreeing these targets. The school provided additional support for more able pupils through individualised programmes which challenged them appropriately. The effective support for learning teacher provided a range of group and individual programmes to support pupils with specific learning difficulties. Support for learning auxiliaries provided well-targeted support. The school had effective links with external agencies including the authority's psychological services and a family support worker. The school nurse provided helpful advice and support on the administration of medication.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The quality of pastoral care in the school was very good. Staff were sensitive to pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. The school had successfully implemented a detailed care and welfare policy, which included clearly stated procedures for the protection of children and other aspects of pupil safety. Pupils were familiar with the school's procedures for dealing with instances of bullying. They were well informed about personal safety and substance misuse. The playground buddies for younger pupils were encouraging responsible and caring attitudes towards each other. Pupils demonstrated positive attitudes to their health and wellbeing through regular physical exercise and participation in the varied out-of-school-hours club. There were well-organised arrangements for pupils transferring from the nursery to P1 and from the primary school to St Mungo's High School.

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>Overall, the quality of accommodation and facilities was good. Classrooms were bright, spacious and well resourced. Facilities included a well-used library and computer suite, two general purpose rooms and a large multi-purpose dining hall and gymnasium. The school needed to review the lunchtime arrangements to ensure that pupils' dining experience was organised in a more time efficient manner. Only the ground floor was accessible to those with mobility difficulties. A closed circuit television camera link in the office monitored the secured entrance at the external main door to the school. The narrow access road to the school had resulted in congestion caused by buses and cars collecting and dropping off pupils at St Francis Xavier's RC Primary School and St Mungo's High School. This was a hazard to pupils entering and leaving the school and during the working day. Visitor and staff parking facilities were limited.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff, parents and pupils were very proud of the school. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Staff morale was very high as a consequence of the well-developed teamwork. Staff had high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Pupils had been involved in the development of the school's rules and their behaviour was exemplary. Assemblies and the well-developed praise system were used effectively to encourage positive behaviour and acknowledge pupils' wider achievements. The school had established very good links with its local parish and school chaplain and there were appropriate arrangements for religious observance. In almost all classes, staff emphasised a sense of equality, fairness and concern for others. This was reinforced continuously by all staff, for example through their charity work and the religious and moral education programme. Pupils with additional support needs were included fully in the life of the school. The school had an appropriate race equality policy and teachers were extending the emphasis on promoting cultural diversity across the curriculum.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Partnerships with the School Board, Parents' Association, parents and the wider community were very good. Annual written pupil reports provided good information about pupil progress. Meetings for parents were well attended and informative. Parents were appropriately consulted about sensitive health issues and the school's health group included a parent representative. The school had very good links with three parishes. A church credit union, run by a local church, visited the school regularly to encourage a large number of children to save. Several parent volunteers assisted pupils in a range of appropriate ways, for example by helping them to improve their reading skills and scribing for children who experienced difficulty with writing. Through workshops, teachers provided parents of pupils at P1 with advice on how to help children with their reading, writing and mathematics. The school had strong links with St Mungo's High School and the integrated learning community. At P4, pupils had worked with the community police officer to learn about social responsibility and members of the local community attended the school's winter fayre and coffee mornings. Pupils participated in an annual fair organised by INEOS which provided learning activities including model bridge building. A few parents would welcome more comprehensive and regular newsletters from the school.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

The headteacher and staff of St Francis Xavier's RC Primary School provided a caring, inclusive and supportive learning environment in which pupils felt safe, happy and valued. Staff worked very well as a team. Almost all teaching was very well organised and of high quality. Arrangements for pastoral care were strong. Pupils with additional support needs were well supported. Teachers had yet to ensure that the needs of all pupils were successfully met. Attainment in English language was good and steadily improving and in mathematics was very good.

The headteacher provided strong, visible leadership. He was highly committed to the school and its pupils. He had a detailed knowledge of the school, pride in its strengths and a clear view of its priorities for improvement. He had been successful in generating very good staff teamwork and a common sense of purpose. He was very well supported by a depute headteacher and principal teacher who fulfilled their roles effectively and with a high degree of commitment. Senior managers were accessible and supportive of staff, parents and pupils. Their collective impact was reflected in the

improving attainment trends, the overall consistency of approaches to teaching and the very positive environment for learning. A suitable range of strategies was in place for monitoring whole school developments and pupil progress. This included direct monitoring of teachers' planning, observation of teaching and sampling the quality of pupils' work. Staff were provided with constructive feedback on teaching and learning. Senior managers worked in classes on a regular, systematic basis to offer support and leadership for learning. The depute headteacher was developing an appropriate system for tracking the progress of pupils in relation to national assessments in English language and mathematics. The school standards and quality report was accurate and clear and staff were actively involved in the process of self-evaluation. Arrangements for self-evaluation were having a clear and beneficial impact on improving teaching and classroom organisation across the school. To maintain the momentum for improvement, staff had recognised the need to focus more directly on challenging learning for higher attaining pupils and on the encouragement of pupils' creativity and independence. Overall, through the commitment of senior managers and staff, the school was well placed to continue to improve.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve the way they meet pupils' needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve opportunities for active and independent learning at all stages, including more effective use of information and communications technology;
- continue to develop appropriate support and challenge in writing to improve pupils' attainment;
- ensure the learning needs of all pupils are supported and that they understand what they need to do next to improve their learning; and
- address the health and safety issues identified in the report regarding traffic management in and around the school and ensure lunch arrangements provide sufficient time for pupils to eat their lunches.

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.

Kate Hannah
HM Inspector

29 May 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	good
The teaching process	very good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very 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	very good
Leadership across the school	very good
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
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 encouraged their children to work to the best of their ability. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • 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 the school. • Teachers were good at telling them how they were getting on with their work and letting them know when they had done something well. • The school helped to keep them safe and healthy. 	<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"> • Teachers were happy with all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few support staff would welcome more opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process.

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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