

**Victoria Primary School  
and Nursery Class  
Falkirk Council  
1 April 2008**

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## 1. Background

Victoria Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in December 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 parents.

The school serves the outskirts of the town of Falkirk and is part of the Graeme Integrated Learning Community. At the time of the inspection the roll was 406, including 19 pupils in the enhanced provision classes and 58 children in the nursery class. The enhanced provision classes were attended by pupils from across the Council area, who had additional support needs. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was below the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The progress made in improving provision in the nursery class.
- The steps taken by the newly appointed headteacher to improve the school.

## 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 in the nursery class said that they felt welcome in the nursery and that their children enjoyed being at nursery. Parents of pupils in the primary stages were positive about the majority of aspects of school life. They thought that their children enjoyed being in school and that parents' evenings were helpful and informative. Parents felt that the school's reputation in the community needed to be improved and that they would like more information about their child's strengths and learning needs.

Parents interviewed noted that there had recently been significant improvements in the school. Pupils felt they were treated fairly in school but said that the behaviour of some pupils could be better. All staff liked working in the school but would like to improve team work and communication.

#### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

##### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The nursery provided a broad and balanced curriculum across key aspects of learning. The layout of the playroom and provision of resources had improved, which allowed children better choice in their learning. Children had an appropriate range of activities, resources and low level displays to investigate and explore. Staff made good use of the outdoor area to develop children's learning. The overall quality of the primary school curriculum was weak. Led by the new headteacher, teachers from P1 to P7 had recently begun to review programmes of study and improve how they planned appropriate learning experiences for all pupils, including those pupils in the enhanced provision classes. All pupils participated in physical education for two hours each week, in line with national recommendations. Additional time had recently been allocated to the teaching of English language and mathematics but this had yet to have an impact on improving pupils' attainment. There were significant weaknesses across the curriculum. The learning activities in English language and mathematics did not offer pupils sufficient access to high quality resources. Across the school, pupils did not have regular, effective opportunities to develop skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT). There were limited opportunities to develop and acquire skills across the curriculum. Pupils attending the enhanced provision facility did not experience a wide curriculum. They were included in mainstream classes for aspects of their work, particularly English language and mathematics. The school had recognised the need to improve the overall quality of inclusion of enhanced provision pupils into mainstream classes. In the nursery and enhanced provision classes, staff interactions with children were skilled and helped children to think and develop new ideas. The overall quality of teaching across the primary classes was adequate. Most teachers gave clear explanations. The majority made effective use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. A few had started to share with pupils what they were expected to learn and occasionally they used the end of lessons to review what had been learned. The quality of homework across the school was too variable.

In the nursery, staff were warm and caring in their interactions with children. They made some good use of questions and dialogue to engage with children but this did not always challenge children's thinking well enough. Staff needed to intervene more appropriately during children's play to extend and develop children's learning. Staff used appropriate use of praise to celebrate children's achievements. From P1 to P7 the quality of learning was weak. At P1 and P2, staff had recently begun to build on pupils' nursery class experiences by providing pupils with more opportunities to be active in their learning, for example, to learn through play. Pupils in P1 to P7 responded well to the few tasks and activities which allowed them to be independent and creative. Across the school, pupils did not have enough constructive opportunities to work with others. In most classes there was too much time at the beginning and end

of the school day when pupils were not purposefully engaged in learning. Often pupils worked at too slow a pace on unchallenging tasks.

The school had taken some good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Children in the nursery class were making good progress in expressive and aesthetic development, knowledge and understanding of the world and physical development and movement. They used a wide range of art and craft materials creatively. They explored sound and rhythm with musical instruments appropriately. Children were developing their ICT skills by operating simple programmes on the computer and when using the programmable toys. They were developing their coordination using large and small construction toys. The newly-appointed headteacher had recently increased the pupils' access to educational visits to support their learning. Pupils' involvement in the life of the school was limited but plans were in hand to address this. From P1 to P7, pupils had adequate opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Most pupils participated in a good range of after-school clubs, including football, basketball, recorder and arts and crafts through which they enhanced their skills and social development. Pupils were encouraged to develop their skills of good conduct and to tolerate difference through the recently established weekly assembly. Pupils in the enhanced provision classes had limited opportunities to develop their skills and social skills through activities outside school.

### **English language**

Children in the nursery class were making good progress in communication and language. Most children were confident when talking to one another and other adults. Children were beginning to recognise their name. Some children were experimenting with mark making and a few were beginning to form letters and words. This was enhanced by the opportunities to develop early writing skills at the post office area set up in the class. Most children enjoyed listening to stories and sharing books with one another. A weekly lending library encouraged parents to read at home with their child. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in English language was weak. In recent years, attainment in reading had increased slightly but in writing it had fluctuated. At P1 and P2, an increasing number of pupils achieved national levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, these early gains had not been maintained. By the end of P4, most pupils had achieved the appropriate national levels in reading and in writing. By P7, less than half of pupils achieved appropriate levels in writing but most achieved these levels in reading. A significant minority of pupils across the school were making slower progress than might be expected in both reading and writing. A few pupils receiving additional support were making limited progress in their learning. The school was not able to provide reliable assessment of pupils' progress in listening and talking. At all stages, most pupils listened well to teachers but lacked skill in group discussion. Across the school, most pupils read aloud with confidence but were not making sufficient progress in developing reading skills. Pupils did not read widely for pleasure and had too few opportunities to discuss texts. At P7, pupils could discuss only a limited number of favourite authors or the types of books they preferred to read. Pupils' knowledge of grammar and punctuation was variable. Attainment in writing at all stages was too variable. Pupils wrote for a variety of purposes but they did not have enough opportunities to write at length. The quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of written work were not sufficiently high. The majority of pupils in the enhanced provision were making limited progress in their development of skills in English language.

## **Mathematics**

In the nursery class, children were making good progress in early mathematics. Most children were able to sort and match objects by shape, size and colour. Most children were using appropriate mathematical language in play situations. For example, many were developing an awareness of shape and size through the post office topic. Most children could count numbers to five with confidence. Children would benefit further from more opportunities to solve simple problems in play situations. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was weak. In recent years, pupils' attainment had improved slightly. Most pupils from P1 to P4 were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment but by P7 only a majority of pupils achieved these levels. The school had not implemented effective approaches to ensure that early gains in mathematics were maintained. Most pupils at the middle and upper stages were capable of achieving higher standards. Pupils with additional support needs were making limited progress towards meeting their agreed learning targets. By P7, pupils were insufficiently skilled in the use of ICT to create graphs, spreadsheets or databases. Pupils demonstrated accuracy in written calculation but most lacked confidence in mental mathematics. They did not have a sufficient understanding of decimals, percentages and fractions. Their knowledge of measurement was not well developed. Pupils had a good knowledge and understanding of the properties of shapes. At all stages, pupils were unable to identify and use a range of strategies to help solve mathematical problems. The majority of pupils in the enhanced provision classes were not making sufficient progress towards their targets in mathematics.

### **5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?**

Meeting children's needs was adequate in the nursery class and weak across the primary stages. In the nursery class, staff made observations of children at play but did not use this information effectively enough to plan for next stages in learning. Staff had made some progress in tracking children's development and progress but they needed to evaluate children's progress more systematically. Staff had a good understanding of their responsibilities in planning for children who needed additional help in their learning. Well-judged support was in place for a few children. Overall, there were important weaknesses arrangements at P1 to P7 for supporting pupils' learning. Teachers did not always provide work which was appropriate to the needs of all pupils. In the majority of lessons, particularly in English language and mathematics, teachers relied too heavily on work from textbooks or worksheets and this resulted in a lack of challenge for pupils. Pupils in P1 to P3 did not have enough opportunities to engage in and learn through well-planned play activities. The arrangements for identifying pupils requiring additional help was not effectively targeting pupils with the greatest needs. There was a need to establish systems to identify pupils with additional support needs at an earlier stage and to plan appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) to support them. Parents were not yet involved enough in agreeing short and long-term learning targets in IEPs. The network support teacher provided good support to identified pupils when working in small groups or individually. A team of support staff worked well with teachers and provided assistance to individuals and small groups of pupils. The timetabling of

support staff did not ensure that pupils' support was fairly shared across the school to best meet needs of all pupils.

The enhanced provision facility provided opportunities for pupils to make good progress in their learning when working in the enhanced provision classes. This good learning was not maintained when pupils were included in mainstream classes. The pace of learning when working in the enhanced provision classes for most pupils was appropriate and most activities were challenging. The majority of pupils' IEP's contained sufficiently clear learning targets to ensure that each pupil's progress could be carefully monitored. Staff in the enhanced provision classes took care to share these targets with parents. Pupils did not have appropriate targets set for personal and social development. Mainstream primary class teachers were not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing the IEPs of enhanced provision pupils to allow them to meet pupils' needs effectively. The school planned to develop further the quality of pupils' inclusion into mainstream classes. Pupils' social skills benefited from joining their peers in the mainstream classes and from being suitably involved in the wider life of the school. They moved around the school with confidence, readily joined in groups and took part in activities such as excursions and after-school activities. The speech and language therapist worked effectively with teachers and support staff to ensure that pupils' language and communication needs were being met. There was no clear rationale for pupils being placed in the enhanced provision classes. Pupils did not have a multi-agency review to establish their needs and to monitor progress. Staff had insufficient training to deal confidently with the wide range of additional support needs of pupils placed in the enhanced provision classes.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

| Aspect        | Comment  |
|---------------|--|
| Pastoral care | The quality of pastoral care was good. Children in the nursery enjoyed healthy snacks and had a developing awareness of good hygiene. All staff in the nursery and primary classes had been involved in training for the protection of children and were aware of their responsibilities to keep children safe. The school had established procedures for ensuring the care, welfare and protection of all pupils. They implemented effectively the school's approaches to dealing with any incidents of bullying. The school had recently reviewed its policy on managing pupil behaviour but this was at an early stage of development. The majority of staff dealt sensitively with any incidents of pupil misbehaviour. Good arrangements were in place to support the transition of children from nursery to P1 and pupils at P7 to Graeme High School. |

| <b>Aspect</b>  | <b>Comment</b>  |
|--|---|
| Quality of accommodation and facilities  | <p>The quality of accommodation and facilities was very good. Teaching areas were attractive and well equipped. Pupils' work was displayed to good effect. Strengths included the gymnasium, dining facilities and general purpose areas. The newly-appointed headteacher had recently taken steps to improve the learning environment with the purchase of modern furniture and by creating spaces for pupils to learn through play. Pupils had regular access to large hardstanding and grassed grounds, and well-chosen equipment to support a variety of purposeful play. The school had good arrangements for security. Users with restricted mobility could access only part of the school buildings.</p>   |
| Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality | <p>Staff in the nursery had created an environment where children and parents were made to feel very welcome. All children were treated equally and with equal concern. Primary pupils identified strongly with the school and were proud to be associated with it. Most pupils were polite, well behaved, and cooperative with teachers and with each other. The behaviour of a few pupils detracted from the learning of others. The school did not have a planned approach to the development of pupils' personal and social development. Teachers promoted achievement through the regular use of praise and incentives for good work. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' work, attainment and attendance were not consistently high. Recently-introduced weekly school assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance, encouraging positive behaviour and celebrating pupils' efforts and achievements. Across the school, approaches to developing pupils' understanding of religious diversity and racial equality were inconsistent.</p> |
| Partnership with parents and the community                                     | <p>The school had good relationships with parents and local schools in the learning community. The Parent Council was supportive and took a keen interest in the work of the school. The school had recently improved its communications with parents, including helpful informative newsletters, detailed twice-yearly reports on pupils' progress, and well-organised parents' evenings. Parents were not as yet consulted on sensitive health issues. The school recognised a need to involve parents more in their children's learning. The newly-appointed headteacher had plans to become more involved in the local community and to establish links with local businesses.</p>  |

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Victoria Primary School and Nursery Class had the potential to provide a good quality of education for its pupils. There remained a significant number of important issues to be addressed by the newly-appointed headteacher and her staff. Attainment in English language and mathematics was weak. The quality of teaching overall was adequate and pupils' learning experiences were weak. Provision for pupils in the nursery class was good. There were important strengths in pupils' experiences within the enhanced provision classes, this was not consistently the case when enhanced provision pupils were integrated into mainstream primary classes. The school had, as a high priority, set out to ensure the inclusion of pupils from the enhanced provision in the full life of the school. This needed further attention as it was not of a sufficiently high quality. Arrangements for supporting pupils with additional support needs required to be improved. Tasks and activities were not well matched to the needs of individual pupils. At P1 to P7, a few pupils could have achieved more if they had been consistently provided with greater pace and challenge.

In her very short time in post, the Headteacher had already taken a number of positive steps to improving the school. She was beginning to develop a team approach to leading the school. Good steps had been taken to consult staff and parents about key priorities and a number of important areas had been identified for improvement. The headteacher had led improvements to aspects of the curriculum, learning and teaching. She and her depute headteacher (DHT) had recognised the need to review the role of the DHT in supporting school improvement. The two principal teachers were effectively deployed and provided very good support to the staff and pupils in the nursery and primary classes. The school's approaches to self-evaluation were weak. The headteacher and the senior management team need to continue to work with staff to further improve pupils' attainment, the quality of pupils' learning experiences and aspects of teaching. More systematic monitoring by all staff of pupils' progress, with involvement of pupils and parents, will enable the school to continue to improve. The newly-appointed headteacher, with the support of the education authority, had the capacity to take the school forward.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were eight recommendations. Good progress had been made with seven recommendations. One recommendation to improve staff's use of assessment information to further improve planning for children's learning in the nursery needed to be further developed.

### **Main points for action**

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

- the quality of the curriculum;
- pupils' progress in English language and mathematics;
- provision to meet the learning needs of all pupils, particularly arrangements for inclusion of pupils in the enhanced provision classes when integrating into mainstream primary classes;
- management, leadership and self evaluation of the school, enhanced provision and the nursery; and
- staff's use of assessment information to further improve planning for children's learning in the nursery.

### **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. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority to monitor progress. They will publish an interim report on progress within one year of the publication of this report. Thereafter, HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Sarah Cushley  
HM Inspector

1 April 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.

| <b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b> |          |
|---|----------|
| Structure of the curriculum                             | weak     |
| The teaching process                                    | adequate |
| Pupils' learning experiences                            | weak     |
| Pupils' attainment in English language                  | weak     |
| Pupils' attainment in mathematics                       | weak     |

| <b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b> |      |
|---|------|
| Meeting pupils' needs                           | weak |

| <b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>                |           |
|---|-----------|
| Pastoral care   | good      |
| Accommodation and facilities                                    | very good |
| Climate and relationships                                       | adequate  |
| Expectations and promoting achievement                          | adequate  |
| Equality and fairness   | adequate  |
| Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community | good      |

| <b>Leading and improving the school</b> |          |
|---|----------|
| Leadership across the school            | adequate |
| 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.

| <b>What parents thought the school did well</b>   | <b>What parents think the school could do better</b>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their child in either the nursery class, primary or enhanced provision classes was treated fairly.</li> <li>• The school was well led.</li> <li>• The school building was kept in good order.</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents felt that they would like more information on their child's strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• They felt that reports were not helpful in giving them information about their child.</li> <li>• Parents would like more opportunities to be included in decisions affecting their child.</li> </ul> |
| <b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>  | <b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly, expected them to work hard and told them when they had done something well.</li> <li>• Teachers helped keep them safe and healthy.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A significant number of pupils thought that the behaviour of some pupils was not consistently good.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>What staff thought the school did well</b>   | <b>What staff think the school could do better</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils' successes were celebrated regularly.</li> <li>• Support staff felt they had good opportunities to be involved in decision making in the school.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching staff felt that communications between senior managers and staff could be improved.</li> <li>• A significant number of staff felt that senior managers did not operate effectively as a team.</li> </ul>   |

## **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, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Endeavour House, 1 Greenmarket, Dundee DD1 4QB or by telephoning 01382 576700. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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](mailto:ask@sps.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.sps.org.uk](http://www.sps.org.uk).

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