

**Sacred Heart RC Primary School
Falkirk Council**

20 January 2004

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1. Background

Sacred Heart RC Primary School was inspected in September and October 2003 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 and the environment for learning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents and staff, and to pupils from P4 to P7. Further information about responses to questionnaires appears in Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team also met with the chairperson of the School Board and with a group of parents.

The school is a denominational school serving the town of Grangemouth and surrounding areas. At the time of the inspection the roll was 215, including 34 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

An integrated inspection of pre-school provision was carried out at the same time by HMIE and the Care Commission and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The range and quality of extra-curricular activities available to pupils.
- The consistently good quality of teaching.
- The caring and positive attitudes fostered by the school community.
- The high standard of accommodation and facilities, including the very attractive school garden.
- The very positive and effective links between the school, parents and the wider community.

3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff.

Parents, carers, pupils and staff were generally very positive about the school. Parents and carers were very happy with almost all aspects of the work of the school, including its positive reputation in the local community and the concern shown by staff for the care and welfare of their children. Pupils enjoyed being at school and felt that they had a say in deciding how to make the school better. About a third of pupils from P4 to P7 felt that the behaviour of some pupils in the school was not always good. Overall, staff were positive about the school and liked working there. A minority of staff felt that communication within the school was not always effective and that teamwork could have been better developed.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided pupils with a broad and generally well balanced curriculum. However, pupils required better opportunities to develop skills in English language in a variety of contexts. Pupils had increasing opportunities to develop skills in information and communications technology (ICT). There was a good emphasis on developing appropriate personal and social skills, particularly through work in health and religious education. Pupils at P6 and P7 were learning French. Most pupils had increasing access to a very good range of out-of-school activities, including gardening and sports clubs. All teachers used homework regularly to build on pupils' learning in class.

The quality of learning and teaching in the school was good overall. Teachers worked with pupils in an appropriate range of whole-class, group and individual situations. Most teachers shared the purpose and aims of lessons with pupils. Teachers' questioning was often very good and stimulated some high quality class discussions. Almost all teachers made effective use of praise to help support and motivate pupils. Increasingly, pupils had some good opportunities to become involved in setting their own learning goals. They now needed clearer advice on what they required to do to make further progress. Effective use of structured play sessions at P1 allowed younger pupils to learn in an active and enjoyable manner. Overall, however, there were too few opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively. Staff needed to ensure that all pupils had opportunities to become more actively involved in their learning. They also needed to ensure that there was a consistent match between the abilities of attainment groups and the level of challenge offered. Teachers should adopt a more consistent approach to assessing pupils' work in, for example, mathematics and English language.

Pupils were achieving success in a range of important areas. Across the school, most pupils were very well behaved and responded well to the positive encouragement offered by staff. At P7, pupils were able to use role-play to explore aspects of life in Scotland during World War II. All pupils were able to listen and reflect on issues raised at an in-school mass. A highly effective buddy system had given P7 pupils significant responsibilities for supporting the induction of P1 pupils into the school community. Pupils had been highly motivated by the opportunities provided by the extension of after-school activities. Many pupils had contributed positively to the development of the school's garden. Across the stages, pupils were becoming increasingly confident in developing computer skills. A group of senior pupils had made good use of these skills to produce a very good school magazine at the end of the previous session.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Across the stages, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. At some stages, a number of pupils achieved these levels earlier than expected. Most pupils were able to listen for information and respond appropriately. At all stages, pupils were able to talk confidently about ideas and experiences, and offer valid opinions on relevant topics. However, staff needed to provide increased opportunities for pupils to listen and talk in groups. In P1 and P2, pupils were making very good progress with their early literacy skills. Pupils in P3 were able to read fluently and accurately. At all stages, pupils read with good

understanding. They now required increased opportunities to read a broader range of texts as part of their coursework. In all classes, pupils made good use of the school library to extend their reading. Almost all pupils were able to write at some length. Standards of spelling and use of punctuation were good. Overall, however, writing tasks needed to be more challenging and to build more consistently on pupils' prior learning.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Standards of attainment had improved in recent years. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in information handling, number, money and measurement and shape, position and movement. At most stages, some pupils were exceeding these levels. Those who had not attained appropriate levels had been identified and most were making some progress on relevant coursework. There was further scope, however, for addressing the needs of these pupils more effectively. Pupils at the early stages were making a good start to working with numbers. Most pupils from P3 to P7 were developing good skills in mental calculation. However, at all of these stages some pupils were not sufficiently prompt in responding to oral questions involving mental calculation. Across the school, pupils were confident in interpreting information from graphs. Almost all pupils had a sound knowledge of the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Some were less secure in their understanding of aspects of position and movement. Pupils' skills in problem-solving were limited.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff provided very effective support for pupils' emotional and social development. They knew pupils well and took good account of their needs. A range of appropriate policies was in place and known to staff. There were clear and shared approaches to addressing child protection issues and, for instance, safe use of the internet. All staff were aware of the school's procedures to deal with bullying incidents. Almost all pupils felt safe in the school and confident that matters of concern would be dealt with effectively. Pupils had access to worry boxes through which potential problems were addressed. Older pupils offered positive support and encouragement for younger ones.

Class teachers had established positive relationships with pupils and provided some good support to groups and individuals. The headteacher worked with groups of pupils as part of her classroom monitoring activities. The part-time learning support teacher met with teachers on a regular basis to plan for pupils' learning needs. She offered some good assistance to pupils who required additional help with their reading. Support assistants generally worked well with class teachers to support pupils in a range of areas, including mathematics. The school and education authority had effective procedures in place for maintaining Records of Needs. Individualised educational programmes were used for pupils who required additional support in aspects of their learning. These were shared with parents. However, pupils needed to be more closely involved in setting their own targets and monitoring progress. The school provided some very good support for individual children with specific learning needs. This included an individualised motor skills programme and effective support from the bilingual and travelling pupils' support service. Overall, however, the headteacher and staff needed to review how best to organise available support to meet pupils' needs more effectively.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the school's accommodation was very good. The school building was very clean and well maintained. Pupils were taught in bright, spacious classrooms. Staff and pupils had access to a range of additional teaching areas, including a recently refurbished library. In liaison with the education authority, the headteacher had made very effective use of additional funds to improve facilities for both pupils and staff. In co-operation with both the local community and local industry, the school had made excellent progress in developing attractive garden areas which helped to further enhance learning opportunities for pupils.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Relationships between staff and pupils were good. Pupils showed a sense of pride in their school and almost all wore school uniform. Overall, the behaviour of pupils was very good. They were helpful and polite to visitors, staff and each other. The pupil council was clear about its role and was given good opportunities to represent the views of fellow pupils. Members had recently been consulted about the school's new homework policy. Staff promoted a sense of fairness throughout the school. Pupils' achievements were regularly recognised at school assemblies. Regular masses and services provided good opportunities for religious observance. In general, staff worked well as a team. However, there was a need to ensure that the contributions of all staff were recognised.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had developed very good arrangements for communicating with parents. These included regular newsletters, information evenings and a helpful and effective homework notebook. Parents and the broader community were welcomed to assemblies and school masses. Regular parent helpers assisted staff and pupils in a range of ways, including organising the school library. The School Board and parent teacher association provided very good support and were kept well informed of relevant issues by the headteacher. Highly effective links with both the local parish and community organisations all contributed positively to the life of the school.</p>

7. Improving the school

The school was well placed to improve further. It had established a clear and positive place in the local community. The headteacher and staff worked in a highly effective partnership with parents. The quality of teaching was consistently good. Pupils were very secure and happy in the caring environment. Standards of attainment in English language and mathematics were good overall, and pupils were achieving success in a variety of contexts. While staff provided some good support for less able pupils, there was a need to review how available staff were deployed to meet the needs of all pupils.

The headteacher led the school community well. She had fostered very good and productive working relationships with the School Board, parents in general and the broader local community. The impact of this had been significant and had resulted in clear improvements to the school building and grounds. Her partnership with the local parish was very positive and enhanced the school's positive sense of Christian identity. Staff were encouraged to take on significant curriculum responsibilities and had responded well. Parents and pupils had been consulted on a range of issues. Overall, however, approaches to self-evaluation and planning for improvement were inconsistent. The headteacher's monitoring of the work of the school needed to focus more clearly on improving the quality of pupils' experiences, as well as careful tracking of pupils' progress in coursework and attainment. The school development plan should focus on a smaller number of priorities that will lead to improved learning for all pupils.

The school and education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the work of the school and to raise achievement for all its pupils. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- ensure that all pupils are more directly involved in, and take increased responsibility for, their own learning;
- improve programmes in English language to provide a broader and more stimulating range of activities for pupils; and
- further develop approaches to self-evaluation to ensure a clear focus on both the quality and improvement of pupils' learning experiences.

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 and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report parents and carers will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Peter McNaughton
HM Inspector

20 January 2004

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Leadership

We judged the following to be fair

- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<p>Overall, parents were very positive about the work of the school, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school’s good reputation in the local community. • school buildings are kept in good order. • children are treated fairly at school. • staff show concern for the care and welfare of children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, parents had no significant concerns about the work of the school.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<p>Overall, pupils were very positive about their experiences in school, including the fact that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were stuck. • pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better. • they got on well with other pupils. • the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the behaviour of some pupils in the school. • greater consistency in the amount of homework they received from stage to stage.
<p>What pleased teaching staff most</p>	<p>What teaching staff would like to see improved</p>
<p>Overall, teaching staff were very positive about the work of the school, including the fact that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community. • pupils were enthusiastic about learning. • there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • they were aware of the school’s procedures relating to child protection. 	<p>A minority of teaching staff would like to see the following areas improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of teamwork. • the quality of leadership.

What pleased support staff most	What support staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community. • pupils were enthusiastic about learning. • there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • they liked working in the school. 	<p>A minority of support staff would like to see the following areas improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of teamwork. • more staff discussion about how to achieve school priorities. • effectiveness of communication.

How can you contact us?

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, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8437. Copies are also available on our website: www.hmie.gov.uk.

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

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