

**St Mary's RC Primary School  
Bo'ness  
Falkirk Council  
28 June 2005**

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## 1. Background

St Mary's RC Primary School was inspected in March 2005 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 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, representatives of the parents' association (PA), and a group of parents.

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

St Mary's RC Primary School is a denominational school serving the town of Bo'ness and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 203, including 48 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

The nursery class was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Relationships between staff and pupils and the pastoral care provided for pupils.
- Well behaved, friendly pupils who were enthusiastic in their learning.
- Partnerships with parents, the School Board and the community.
- Staff commitment to supporting pupils' learning and their high expectations of pupils' attainment and achievements.
- The headteacher's leadership and strong staff teamwork.

### **3. What are the views of parents and carers, 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 and carers, pupils and staff were very positive about most aspects of the school. In discussions, parents and carers were very satisfied with the attention given to the care and welfare of their children, the school's good reputation in the community and the approachable staff and headteacher. A few were concerned about the lack of information given in written reports and the lack of time on parents' evenings to discuss their child's progress. All pupils felt that teachers praised them when they had done something well and helped them when they were having difficulties. They thought teachers were good at letting them know how they could improve their learning. A few felt that not all pupils were treated fairly and expressed concern about the behaviour of a few other pupils. All staff liked working in the school. They felt pupils were enthusiastic about learning and that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils.

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

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

Pupils experienced a broad and balanced curriculum which helped them successfully develop a good range of skills. Pupils' skills in mental mathematics were developing well as a result of more focused, interactive oral work. Their skills in science and social subjects were progressing well and they took part in a range of practical group work activities. Their skills in listening and talking were improving. However, staff did not make sufficient use of information and communications technology to support pupils' learning in mathematics. Pupils' enterprise skills were not well developed. At the early stages, learning through play activities were not sufficiently focused on improving pupils' skills in working together on a wide range of curricular activities. Teaching approaches had many strengths. Teachers gave clear explanations and made good use of praise to build pupils' self-confidence and reward their achievements. Most made very effective use of direct, interactive teaching in mathematics. Most teachers were skilled in using questions to check pupils' understanding and shared with pupils what they expected them to learn from their lessons, especially in mathematics and writing. However, a few did not make consistent use of questions to extend pupils' responses and their lessons did not encourage pupils to ask questions or share what they had learned. Homework was set regularly and appropriately.

Almost all pupils were well motivated, hardworking and well behaved. In many classes, pupils worked effectively in pairs or small groups to support one another in listening, talking, writing, music and drama activities. At P1/2, pupils responded very well to teaching approaches which encouraged them to respond and discuss their learning. Pupils at P4/5 and P6 worked together enthusiastically to solve problems but this did not take place across the school. In the most effective lessons, the pace of learning was brisk. However, in a small number of lessons the pace did not provide appropriate challenge for

several pupils. Across the school, pupils were encouraged to take personal responsibility for their learning, although more independent learning was needed, especially at P6 and P7. Almost all pupils were making very good progress towards developing self-confidence and self-esteem. Older pupils took responsibility for others by looking after pupils at P1 and nursery children. Pupils were involved effectively in making decisions about the school through the pupil council and house captain system. The council was planning improvements to the school garden and had successfully raised funds. Most recently, it had corresponded with the education authority regarding the decoration of the interior of the school. All pupils had learned important points concerning sustainability through taking part in a paper recycling scheme. Pupils took great pride in their school receiving an Eco school award for its commitment to being environmentally friendly. Pupils at P6 ran a healthy tuck shop for part of the week which was successfully promoting healthy food choices. Pupils took part enthusiastically in a wide range of out-of-hours clubs run by staff and parents. Pupils were developing skills in skiing, card making, football, chess, netball and cross-stitch.

### **English language**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Over the last three years, the level of pupils' attainment had varied slightly, but had risen in the last year. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in reading, writing, listening and talking. A small number were exceeding these levels. Across the school, most pupils were making good progress in their coursework. In class lessons, almost all pupils listened attentively to staff and to each other. They responded enthusiastically in group discussions and most spoke with confidence and clarity. Most read fluently and with confidence. However, pupils did not read for a wide enough range of purposes and their choice and variety of reading material were too limited. From P3 to P7, most pupils were developing effective skills in writing and were able to plan and write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils' attainment over the past few years had remained stable. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels. From P1 to P3, pupils made a good start to their learning in mathematics. Almost all at P3 had achieved appropriate levels and most at P2 had achieved these earlier than might normally be expected. At P5 and P6, a significant number were exceeding these levels. Most pupils who had not attained appropriate national levels were making suitable progress with classwork. Across the stages, pupils could handle information effectively, but pupils at P7 had too few opportunities to carry out surveys and questionnaires. Pupils' skills in written and mental number work across the school were effective. Most pupils at P6 and P7 were able to calculate 12 and 24 hour time intervals well. They could measure volume accurately using litres and millilitres and length using metres and millimetres. P6 pupils had a good understanding of money and were able to give the correct change from £5. Most pupils were able to identify a common range of two- and three-dimensional shapes. At most stages, their skills in problem-solving and enquiry were too limited. They did not yet discuss and work together on a wide enough range of strategies. Pupils did not take part in practical mathematical tasks across the curriculum.

## 5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were very good. The caring and committed staff knew their pupils well as individuals and were sensitive to their physical, social and emotional needs. They followed clear procedures for dealing with child protection matters, bullying, general medical care and the administration of medicines. Pupils felt safe in the school and could describe the school's procedures for dealing with bullying. They were confident that they could discuss confidential matters with the approachable headteacher and staff. A few pupils were receiving effective, additional help in managing their behaviour. The school had good procedures to assist pupils' entry from nursery to P1. Pupils' transition to secondary education was well supported through an effective programme involving staff from the associated secondary school.

Arrangements for meeting and supporting pupils' needs were good. Teachers continuously assessed pupils' progress and a wide range of staff provided good support for identified pupils. Overall, teachers chose activities well to meet most pupils' needs. However, in a few classes tasks were not sufficiently focused on supporting the needs of higher-achieving pupils. The school had well constructed individualised educational programmes which set out the additional learning needs of a small number of pupils. Staff were developing personal learning plans with pupils which was having a positive impact on further raising pupils' attainment. Due to staffing recruitment difficulties, the school had had no permanent visiting support teacher for a number of months. This had reduced the support given to a number of pupils in their learning. The principal teacher provided effective small group literacy support for a number of pupils from P1 to P3. In mathematics, the headteacher provided more challenging tasks for higher achieving pupils in P6 and P7. She needed to monitor and evaluate the range of support further to help raise attainment.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good. Most classrooms were spacious, well resourced and organised so that pupils could access materials easily. Additional rooms included a library and computer suite which were well used to develop pupils' skills. The small dining area had recently been refurbished with colourful tables and chairs which positively promoted school lunches. There were well-established lunchtime rotas to reduce waiting times. Pupils' art work was very effectively displayed throughout the school. Playground areas, which included two attractive gardens, were well supervised and provided ample space for pupils to play and relax. Building security arrangements were appropriate.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The atmosphere in the school was very friendly and welcoming. Staff, pupils and visitors felt valued, safe and secure. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Throughout the school, the friendly pupils were proud to be associated with the school. Pupils' achievements, both in and out of school, were celebrated in class and at school assemblies. The quality of teamwork and morale among staff was very good. Teachers' high expectations of pupils' attainment and achievements were well met. The school provided regular opportunities for religious observance through daily prayers, weekly assemblies and special masses which promoted a community of faith. Staff took care to involve all pupils in the life of the school and successfully promoted tolerance and respect for others through their health and religious and moral education programmes. They gave good attention to promoting success and equal access to the curriculum for all pupils and encouraged pupils' appreciation of diversity. Further consultation with pupils would have a positive effect on their understanding.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had a very positive partnership with its supportive School Board which had actively promoted improvements in the accommodation, including recent rewiring. The PA provided very good support through fund-raising and other activities, including consultation on school meals and their availability. Parents helped regularly with outings, the preparation of fruit for the healthy tuck shop and out-of-hours clubs. The headteacher had sought staff and parents' views on the new-style written reports on pupils' progress which was resulting in further improvements. Regular newsletters provided information on a range of healthy initiatives, such as promoting the regular intake of fresh water by pupils. The school ensured that parents were suitably involved in sensitive health issues such as personal relationships and planned further consultation on developing curricular aspects on sexual health. Pupils' involvement in school concerts, fairs and fund raising enhanced the school's reputation in the local community. Links with the Church and community were close and productive, particularly the involvement of pupils in the annual Bo'ness Children's Fair festival.</p>

## 7. Improving the school

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

The school provided a caring and supportive learning environment in which pupils were happy, secure and making good progress in all aspects of their learning. Most pupils attained well in English language and mathematics. Teachers had consistently high expectations of pupils' attainment and achievements. The headteacher provided very good leadership. She promoted the celebration of pupils' achievements effectively within the whole school community. She was highly respected by pupils and parents and her practical and inclusive style of leadership had promoted effective staff teamwork. She provided a very effective teaching role model for the strongly committed staff. Staff were developing effective approaches to planning and assessing pupils' progress and learning. They used their expertise and skills well to support pupils' learning and their considerable contributions were highly valued by the headteacher. The principal teacher fulfilled her remit conscientiously, especially in leading the annual staff evaluation of the work of the school.

The school's approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of its work were effective. The headteacher monitored and evaluated learning and teaching using a range of procedures. These included providing teachers with feedback on their plans, sampling pupils' work and making formal visits to classes. The headteacher had recently begun to track pupils' attainment systematically and to discuss individual pupils' progress with teachers. As a result, staff now set clear learning targets to help raise pupils' attainment. Procedures involved teachers in evaluating their own teaching, but did not yet involve pupils fully in evaluating their work and setting targets for their own learning. The school had the clear capacity to ensure ongoing improvement. Working together, the headteacher and staff were well placed to further improve the work of the school.

### **Main points for action**

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

- continue to develop pupils' skills in information and communications technology in mathematics, problem solving and reading;
- ensure consistently high quality learning and teaching; and
- further improve support for pupils' learning to meet pupils' needs more effectively.

### **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.

June Graham  
HM Inspector

28 June 2005

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

### **We judged the following to be very good**

- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Leadership

### **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
- Accommodation and facilities
- Equality and fairness
- Self-evaluation

### **We judged the following to be fair**

- No aspects were found to be in this category

### **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><b>What pleased parents and carers most</b></p>	<p><b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff showed concern for childrens' care and welfare and would respond appropriately to a matter of concern.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils.</li> <li>• They felt that the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written reports and more time at parents' evenings to discuss their child's progress.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased pupils most</b></p>	<p><b>What pupils would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers checked their homework and expected them to work hard.</li> <li>• Teachers told them when they had done something well and explained how they could improve their learning.</li> <li>• The school helped them to keep themselves safe and healthy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How pupils are treated and the behaviour of a few pupils.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased staff most</b></p>	<p><b>What staff would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All liked working in the school which was well led.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards of attainment and pupils' success was celebrated regularly.</li> <li>• Pupils received constructive feedback about their work.</li> <li>• Pupils were enthusiastic about learning and that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant concerns.</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, T1 Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 2917. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **If you wish to comment about primary inspections**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG.

### **Our complaints procedure**

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600265 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. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail [enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)

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