

**St Ronan's Primary School
Alexandria
West Dunbartonshire Council
2 September 2008**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	2
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	5
7. Leading and improving the school	6
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	9
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	10
Appendix 3 Good Practice	11
How can you contact us?	12

1. Background

St Ronan's Primary School was inspected in May 2008 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 Parent Council, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents¹.

St Ronan's Primary School is a denominational school serving Bonhill, an area of Alexandria. At the time of the inspection the roll was 84. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. At the time of the inspection, as part of a national initiative, all pupils in P1 to P3 received a free school meal. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average. The school had been accredited by the local authority as a Health Promoting School and had gained a Silver Eco-Schools Scotland award.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The very high reputation of the school within the local community.
- Improvements in performance in literacy.
- Highly motivated, polite and very well-behaved pupils who willingly took responsibility for their own learning and readily contributed to the life of the school.
- Exceptional quality of feedback provided by teachers to pupils which promoted and developed active learning.
- The very positive ethos of the school and very high expectations of pupils' achievements set by staff.

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 all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents thought that staff made them feel welcome, the school had a very good reputation within the local community, and school buildings were kept in good order. They were concerned that the playground surface was uneven and that not all teachers gave regular homework. All pupils were confident that at least one teacher knew them well and expected them to work to the best of their ability. All teachers and support staff were positive about all aspects of the school. They enjoyed working in the school and felt that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Learners' experiences

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. The school had given an appropriately high priority to improving pupils' literacy skills and was trying out recently-issued draft national advice. Staff had taken helpful steps to develop literacy across the curriculum. For example, pupils at P5 and P6 delivered effective presentations on the local environment as part of their work on talking and listening within English language. Pupils at P6 and P7 were developing their confidence when speaking French. Across the school, teachers and pupils were beginning to make more use of information and communications technology (ICT). The school needed to continue to develop this further. Pupils' health and wellbeing benefited from regular high-quality physical education. Across the school, pupils were knowledgeable about healthy eating. Pupils were developing a knowledge and understanding of other religions and cultures. At P3 pupils could talk confidently about Judaism. In environmental studies, all pupils were learning effectively about their local environment, including Dumbarton Rock, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. The school had correctly identified the need to update the programme for environmental studies. Overall, the quality of teaching for effective learning was very good, ranging from satisfactory to excellent. Not all staff had taken up opportunities to build on best practice. Teachers worked very hard to create stimulating learning environments and provide a range of active learning experiences and shared the purpose of them with pupils. They planned lessons well, gave clear explanations and made very effective use of questioning to develop pupils' thinking and stimulate their interests. Teachers created many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, to work as individuals, in pairs and in groups. They gave feedback very effectively to promote learning. In particular, the quality of some of the feedback on writing was excellent. At the early stages, teachers used homework very effectively to support learning. However, homework was not always used consistently well throughout the school.

Learners' experiences were very good. Pupils were well motivated and hard working. They were very happy in school and considerate to staff and each other. From P1 to P7 they were very actively involved in their own learning and at all stages were challenged through setting personal learning targets. Across the stages, they willingly took

responsibility for their own learning. Each year the school sought the views of pupils about their learning. Overall, pupils were very satisfied that their views were taken into account.

Improvements in performance

Over the past three years, the school had given an appropriately high priority to improving pupils' literacy. In particular, staff had focused on improving levels of attainment in writing. Across the school, teachers had developed a more consistent approach to teaching writing. This approach had been very effective and standards of English language had improved.

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. The school had maintained high, and improving, standards over several years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in writing and most were doing so in reading, listening and talking. Across the school, a significant number of pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making effective progress in their learning. Pupils' listening and talking skills were very well developed. In particular, they had very good skills when talking in groups. Almost all pupils listened well to each other and to adults. Across the school, the majority of pupils had positive attitudes to reading. Every pupil in the school had identified their favourite book and created an attractive display of book covers. Most read with fluency and with understanding. They were confident individuals when discussing the way that writers achieve their effects. Pupils' skills in questioning what they read were very well developed. Across the school, pupils were beginning to produce high quality writing for a range of purposes. Teachers did not use ICT sufficiently to develop pupils' writing further. Pupils' skills in punctuation, spelling and grammar were very good.

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. All pupils at P3, the majority at P4, almost all at P6 and most by the end of P7 were attaining appropriate national levels. Most pupils at the early stages and a few pupils at the upper stages had gained these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making very good progress. Pupils had benefited from the very practical approaches used in mathematics. Following a local litter survey, pupils at the early stages had used ICT to draw a bar graph and completed anti-litter posters. Pupils at P5 and P6 had individually created a range of bar and line graphs of very high quality. Pupils confidently carried out written calculations and presented them very neatly. Pupils were skilful when estimating and measuring length and they confidently used scales to measure weight. Across the school, they had a very good knowledge of shape and angles. They drew maps using symbols and actively followed simple compass directions. Pupils were aware of the range of strategies they could use to solve problems, but they were not always successful when using them.

Pupils showed creativity in art and design when working with the visiting art specialist on Charles Rennie Mackintosh architecture and portraiture. Overall, pupils' attainment in art and design was strong. Across the school, pupils' skills in physical education were developing well. The school provided a range of after-school sports activities which helped promote skills development. The Active Schools Coordinator worked very well with the school to enhance the sports provision and trained pupil play leaders at P6 effectively in playground games.

The school took effective steps to help learners develop their wider achievements, particularly at the upper stages. Achievements outside school were valued and celebrated in corridor displays. Pupils participated in a range of after-school activities including cheerleading and choir. School teams in netball, football and athletics had been successful at local levels. Pupils at P6 and P7 enjoyed personal challenges and developed a sense of teamwork while on a residential outdoor education experience. Pupils in P5 similarly benefited from outdoor education days. The pupil council which included pupils from P5 to P7, contributed well to school improvements. For example, they had helped choose playground games equipment. All pupils at the upper stages willingly took on leadership roles, for example as monitors, play-leaders and buddies to younger pupils. They took these important roles very seriously and responsibly. Pupils at P7 gained greater understanding of global and local environmental issues through participating in a Global Citizenship Day at Our Lady and St Patrick's High School. Pupils at the upper stages had enjoyed the challenges of working with Kirkcaldy College to design and build robots.

The school had made very good progress in addressing the priorities in its improvement plan. In English language this had had a measurable impact on learners' experiences. Teachers had very successfully implemented a range of strategies to develop learning. Overall, the school knew itself well and was committed to improvement.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school met the range of pupils' learning needs well. At all stages, there was a culture of inclusion and achievement. Support for learning assistants provided very good support for individual pupils. They worked very well with class teachers to contribute to very good learning experiences. At times, whole-class lessons did not always meet the learning needs of all pupils. The visiting support for learning teacher interacted well with pupils. She worked closely with class teachers and external agencies to provide appropriate support for individual pupils and groups. The school had clear and effective systems to identify those pupils requiring additional support, including very high achieving and talented pupils. Teachers effectively supported pupils in setting personal learning targets. The school had developed individualised education programmes with long- and short-term targets. The school was working well in partnership with parents to set these targets in consultation with the pupils. No pupil had a coordinated support plan.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The quality of care, welfare and development was very good. Staff gave very high priority to the social, emotional, health and physical needs of their pupils. All staff had been trained in child protection. The school had clear procedures for dealing with any bullying or racial incidents. Pupils were confident that if they reported any such incidents they would be dealt with. Community police officers had spoken to all pupils about keeping safe on the Internet. Procedures for monitoring pupils absent from school were effective. The catering manager had consulted pupils on healthy food choices. Catering staff encouraged pupils to eat well and try unfamiliar food. Staff had been trained in a therapeutic programme to support a few pupils with balance and coordination difficulties. The school had very effective arrangements in place for the transfer of children from local nurseries into P1 and from P7 to Our Lady and St Patrick's High School. Pupils at P7 benefited from taking part in a careers day with local employers at the secondary school.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>Overall, the management and use of resources and available space for learning was good. Open-plan teaching areas were large, with smaller quiet areas off each room. The space available facilitated more active approaches to learning. The attractive and bright assembly hall had a large stage. Classrooms and corridors had very effective displays of pupils' work and interests. Classroom resources were very well organised. The school building was well maintained. However, the playground surface required urgent attention. At times, rooms were too hot for pupils and staff to work well. The school's ICT provision had recently been upgraded and new computers installed. Not all parts of the school buildings were suitable for users with restricted mobility. Changing facilities for physical education were inadequate and pupils did not have sufficient privacy when changing. Building security arrangements were appropriate.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	<p>The school had a very calm, happy, purposeful and stimulating learning environment. A Roman Catholic ethos underpinned all aspects of the school's work. Staff morale was very high. All pupils were very polite and courteous. Across the school, behaviour was very good. Pupils and staff showed respect for each other. Staff set very high expectations of learners' attainment, attendance and behaviour. Staff made significant efforts to ensure that all learners were included in the life of the school. Daily assemblies provided very good opportunities for regular religious observance and setting of expectations. Pupils were very well prepared for the Sacraments and feast days were celebrated. Pupils contributed music and readings to monthly masses in the local church, which was very much appreciated by local parishioners. The school actively promoted anti-sectarianism, in partnership with Ladyton Primary School and Highdykes Primary School. Further work was needed to promote and celebrate the diversity in 21st Century Scotland. Overall, arrangements for ensuring equality, fairness and promoting racial equality were good.</p>
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	<p>The school had established very good partnerships with parents, the Parent Council, PTA and the wider community. A sub-committee of the Parent Council raised and contributed funds to the school. Parents received helpful newsletters which outlined school events and recent achievements, and an annual standards and quality report. Parents received regular written reports on their children's progress and had very good opportunities to learn about new developments and to meet with staff. The headteacher ensured that parents were well informed about sensitive aspects of health education. The catering manager attended parents' evenings to encourage healthy eating. The school gathered the views of parents annually.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

St Ronan's Primary School provided a very good and improving quality of education for its learners. Teaching for effective learning was a major strength. The strong Roman Catholic ethos ensured shared values. Pupils were successful and confident individuals who were aware of their own strengths as learners and areas for

improvement. They felt safe and well looked after in school. Pupils at the upper stages benefited from a range of out-of-class activities and trips. The school improvement plan had correctly identified the need to improve literacy across the school. Steps taken by staff to address this need were making a significant difference. Standards in English language and mathematics were strong and improving.

Overall, the headteacher provided very effective leadership of improvement and change. She was highly committed to the school and its pupils. She worked very well with staff to set targets for improvement. The headteacher had a clear vision for the school and its community. She was very well respected by parents, staff and pupils, who described her as open and approachable. She had very successfully prioritised improvements in literacy and teaching for effective learning. Pupils had benefited from the increased knowledge of staff who had gained additional professional qualifications. Staff were very reflective about their own teaching and their pupils' learning experiences. Staff willingly organised after-school activities. However, staff did not yet have a sufficiently clear understanding of how they could contribute to school improvement through self-evaluation. The headteacher monitored teachers' forward plans and pupils' work and visited classes to observe teaching. She gave helpful feedback to staff. At times, this feedback was too focused on effective classroom management. The open-plan nature of the school facilitated the informal sharing of best practice. However, not all staff had fully benefited from observing the excellent practice that existed within the school. Overall, the school demonstrated effective processes to ensure its continuing improvement.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- continue to explore and develop the current national thinking about the curriculum, including the development of ICT, to further enrich teaching and learning; and
- consider ways of involving all staff in effective improvement through self evaluation.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong 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.

Elizabeth Morrison
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	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Improvements in performance	very good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs	good

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

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	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"> • Their children found their school work stimulating and challenging. • The school was good at encouraging children to work to the best of their ability and there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • The school was good at consulting them about their children. • The school had explained the standard of work expected and how parents could support their children with homework. 	<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 explained work clearly and told them when they had done something well. • Teachers were good at letting them know how they were getting on with their learning and how it could be improved. • Teachers expected them to work hard and helped them when they found work difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quarter of pupils thought that some pupils' behaviour could be better.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff were positive about all aspects of the school. 	<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.

Improvements in literacy

In line with education authority policy to improve literacy across the Council, the school had recognised the need to improve standards of pupils' attainment in English language. The school was using the West Dunbartonshire writing scheme, *Write to the Top*, and trying out recent national advice on the development of literacy through the use of text extracts. For example, pupils worked on *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* with confidence. The school's literacy co-ordinator had led a development to ensure that all pupils benefited from very high quality feedback, in particular in relation to literacy. The quality of her feedback, both oral and written, was exemplary.

Very effective teaching strategies for effective learning were embedded in the culture of the school and in most classes active learning was taking place at all times. Pupils knew where they were in their learning and confidently set realistic and accurate targets for next steps in their own learning. Pupils asked questions well as they read texts depending on the focus of the writing which was to follow. For example, if they were to write with the purpose of developing characters, they would be asking questions as they read, such as:

- What type of character is he/she?
- How do I know?
- What words or phrases are being used in this text to tell me about his/her character?
- How is he/she likely to behave?

Teachers interacted very effectively with both individual pupils and with groups of pupils. As a result of the effective teaching, pupils were taking responsibility for their own learning. At all stages, standards of reading, writing, listening and talking were very high and improving.

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 Executive Director of Education Services, 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, Ground Floor Suite, Unit 7, Blair Court, Clydebank Business Park, Clydebank G81 2LA or by telephoning 0141 435 3550. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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.

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@spso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spso.org.uk.

Crown Copyright 2008

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.