

**St Margaret's Primary School  
Falkirk Council**

**20 April 2004**

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## 1. Background

St Margaret's Primary School was inspected in January 2004 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. Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents and carers, pupils from P4 to P7, and to all staff. Further information about responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

St Margaret's Primary School serves the village of Polmont near Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the total roll was 567, including 100 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

An integrated inspection of the nursery class 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 arrangements to ensure that pupils were well cared for and happy.
- A supportive School Board and an enthusiastic parent teacher association (PTA).
- Staff who showed great commitment and dedication to their work.
- The effective teamwork of teachers who taught at the same stage.
- Pupils who were well-behaved and courteous.

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

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were satisfied with the work of the school. They felt welcome and thought that their children enjoyed school, were treated fairly and cared for well. A significant number expressed concerns about the cramped conditions in the main building and about the state of the hatted accommodation. Almost all pupils enjoyed being at school and said that they were told when they had done something well. Staff were positive about many aspects of the work of the school. All enjoyed working in the school and with their stage partners, and felt that pupils' successes were recognised and celebrated well in school.

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

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

The curriculum was broad and reflected the balance of time as adjusted by the school. In order to raise attainment, the headteacher had increased the time spent each week on mathematics, English language and, at P6 and P7, on environmental studies. The additional allocations of time had not led to improvements in the quality of pupils' attainment in English language or mathematics. The arrangements for timetabling the curriculum limited teachers' flexibility to plan and implement effective programmes. Key curriculum programmes relied too heavily on commercial resources. Staff had begun to address topic areas such as the Eco-Schools programme and were working on citizenship. An annual focus on Scots language celebrated the pupils' culture and heritage. Pupils in P6 and P7 enjoyed learning French and used the language daily as part of classroom routines and other lessons. Pupils at all stages were learning to use information and communications technology (ICT). However, they needed more regular use of hardware and better opportunities to develop their skills in ICT, and to learn by using ICT. Personal and social development was a strong feature of the curriculum and had made a positive impact, particularly on developing pupils' awareness of how to keep themselves safe. A focus on health education encouraged pupils to be aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and to make appropriate choices in the tuck shop. Improvements were needed in the provision for play, particularly at the early stages.

Overall, the quality of teaching was fair. Sound examples of good teaching were observed in English language and mathematics at P1 and from P5 to P7. However, teachers at all stages needed to make more consistent use of a wider and more effective range of teaching approaches. Teachers gave clear instructions and some used questioning well. From P2 to P4, there was insufficient opportunity for pupil and teacher discussion and too strong a focus on preparing pupils to complete written tasks. Teachers did not always ensure that the pace of learning and choice of activities provided sufficient challenge or support to meet the needs of all pupils. At all stages, teachers shared learning targets with pupils but at times the language used was not sufficiently clear for pupils. Praise was used effectively throughout the school and written feedback was beginning to assist pupils in improving their work, particularly in writing. Homework provided a range of cross-curricular activities and was well supported by parents. Most pupils worked well when directed by staff but there were too few occasions for them to be creative or think for themselves. They had little experience of working collaboratively in small groups. Pupils in P7 made good use of their skills in information handling during a science lesson. In craft lessons, pupils followed the visiting specialist's instructions carefully to produce work of a high standard. In art, pupils in P6 and P7 used a range of drawing materials effectively to produce very good sketches and portraits. In music, pupils across the school sang well and with great enjoyment.

Pupils related very well to one another and staff. Senior pupils took responsibility for a number of tasks around the school and carried out their duties conscientiously. A very broad range of extra-curricular activities in sport and expressive arts fostered achievement beyond the classroom. These included football for boys and girls, athletics, basket ball and cheerleading. The pupil council provided pupils with some opportunities to influence the decisions made about the life of the school but there was scope to extend this further. Pupils at P7 had good opportunities to develop their social skills and friendships further through residential experiences.

## **English language**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was fair. Levels of attainment had shown some signs of improvement over the last year. Most pupils were achieving in line with national attainment levels. However, significant numbers were attaining below expectations while others were capable of higher levels of attainment. The good start made by pupils in P1 and P2 had not been sustained. Most pupils listened attentively, responded well to teachers' questioning and were good at following instructions. They talked eagerly about themselves and their interests. More able pupils recalled with enthusiasm many of the books they had read. Across the school, pupils completed coursework successfully but the range of activities offered lacked variety and challenge. Pupils' skills in finding and using information from a range of sources were not developed systematically. In writing, pupils at all stages wrote for a range of purposes and audiences. The majority of pupils from the earliest stages wrote well and at length. However, some had not developed the overall structure of their writing sufficiently well. Most needed to improve their understanding of how to craft a story and use language more effectively to create meaning and effects. The quality of pupils' spelling, handwriting and presentation of work was good.

## **Mathematics**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was fair. There had been no improvement in levels of attainment over the last five years. Many pupils were capable of achieving higher standards. The pace of progress, particularly at the middle stages, was too slow. Overall, most pupils coped well with their coursework but at times this was unchallenging. Pupils at all stages were involved regularly in mental calculation and were able to give answers quickly and accurately. Across the school, pupils displayed an understanding of graphs but needed to apply these skills more often in different contexts across the curriculum. In P4 and P7, pupils had a good understanding of the properties of shapes. From P5 to P7, pupils used appropriate strategies for problem-solving and enquiry competently and talked confidently about the strategies they used. However, they needed more focused opportunities to use these strategies in independent group work across the curriculum.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff knew their pupils well and placed a high priority on their care and welfare. They worked effectively to promote positive behaviour. Pupils felt secure and happy in classrooms and in the playground. Most staff had a sound awareness of child protection procedures and of the school's procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying. However, child protection training for all staff needed to be updated to ensure a clearer understanding of school and education authority procedures. Sound arrangements were in place to help pupils make the transition between the nursery and P1, and from P7 to secondary school.

The arrangements to support pupils with additional learning needs were unsatisfactory. In recent years there had been many changes to the staffing of support for learning. The senior management team had not monitored learning support closely enough to ensure consistency in practice and the appropriate review, preparation and implementation of individualised educational programmes (IEPs). As a result, pupils' needs had not been addressed effectively and IEPs were in need of revision. Records of needs were not managed well and paperwork was incomplete. As part of an education authority initiative, and in line with practice across the authority, a part-time teacher of support for learning had been appointed. She had made very good progress in collating IEPs,

re-organising pupil groups and planning a programme of parental consultation. Additionally, she was to work with a small group of able children to support and extend their learning. The education authority had appointed a principal teacher who took up post immediately prior to the inspection. Her remit was to manage learning support within the school, and she was to be relieved of class commitment for one day each week to focus on learning support. Class teachers now needed to consult with support for learning staff about how best to address pupils' additional learning needs in class. Pupils with specific needs were supported very well by visiting specialists including a teacher of the hearing impaired, a specialist in motor development and a teacher for pupils with English as an additional language. The pupils with whom they worked were making steady progress. Support staff provided good assistance for teachers. However, the deployment of support staff needed to be improved to better meet the needs of pupils and to support teachers more effectively.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Overall, the quality of accommodation was fair. Classroom bays in the main building were very cramped and often noisy. Display areas were limited. Storage needed to be improved. The exterior of the huts was in very poor condition. Internally, classrooms were bright, warm and provided adequate space for pupils. However, there was no toilet provision in any of the huts. There was suitable access for the disabled. Pupils had access to hard surfaced playgrounds and an extensive grassed play area. There was an attractive, central garden. The security system was used appropriately and the grounds were safely fenced. Office accommodation was adequate. Overall, the main building was well maintained and clean. Plans were in place to build a new gym hall.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Pupils, parents and staff identified with the school and took pride in its achievements. There was a welcoming atmosphere. Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Support staff contributed positively to the life and work of the school. However, not all staff or parents felt fully valued members of the school community. The morale of staff was not consistently high. Teachers fostered positive attitudes, mutual respect and fairness in classes. They used praise effectively to motivate pupils and encourage effort. School and classroom awards were used well to recognise pupils' achievements. Pupils were polite, well-behaved and caring of one another. Pupils of different faiths and cultures were welcomed in the school. Teachers had high expectations of pupils' behaviour but there were inconsistencies in their expectations of pupils' learning. They needed to give greater attention to supporting pupils with additional learning needs. Religious observance was a feature of weekly assemblies.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The School Board and PTA were very supportive of the school. The PTA raised considerable sums of money annually for the school. A small number of parent volunteers supported the day-to-day work of the school. Staff, parents and pupils generously raised funds for a range of charities. Parents received annual reports about their child's progress. However, they were given very little advice beyond P1 about how to help their children with homework or about the curriculum followed by their children. Overall, they would welcome better communication by the school and more consultation about important matters affecting their children. The school handbook provided a range of helpful information about school matters. The school needed to provide a wider range of information for parents to keep them up-to-date with school and classroom activities. The school chaplain was a welcome visitor and made a positive contribution to religious observance through assemblies.

## 7. Improving the school

The headteacher was hard-working and committed to the school but had not been wholly successful in addressing key areas of school improvement. The management of the curriculum had a number of weaknesses, including the pace of implementation of new developments. Too much emphasis had been placed on the introduction of curriculum resources without sufficient staff development. There were significant weaknesses in communications and in relationships with some staff and parents. The two deputy headteachers worked closely with the headteacher and gave energetic support to staff in their own departments. However, their impact on whole-school improvement had been too limited. The work of departmental teams had not provided appropriate progression in learning for pupils nor improved sufficiently the overall quality of the curriculum. The broad remit of the management team needed to be focused more effectively on whole-school improvement.

The headteacher and deputy headteachers reviewed teachers' forward plans and pupils' jotters, monitored the quality of learning and teaching and provided oral and written feedback to teachers. They monitored pupils' progress by discussing levels of attainment with staff. However, they had not been wholly successful in improving standards of attainment nor in providing the necessary support for teachers to ensure a suitable pace of progress for pupils. Over recent years the management team had experienced difficulties in consistently monitoring the quality of pupils' learning experiences due to high rates of absence amongst some staff. Recently, staff and parents had not been fully involved in evaluating the work of the school, nor in planning for improvements.

The school's capacity to improve was limited by some difficulties in communication between the senior management team and staff, and the lack of whole-school teamwork. The senior management team and staff should work closely with officers from the education authority to plan and implement the necessary improvements to the curriculum, learning and teaching, and monitoring and evaluation.

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, 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:

- improve the overall structure and quality of the curriculum;
- establish greater consistency in the quality of learning and teaching;
- continue with plans to improve the provision for support for learning;
- improve the deployment of senior managers and support staff;
- ensure the senior management team involve staff more effectively in planning and implementing developments; and
- address the accommodation issues raised in this report, as resources permit.

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

Christine Roebuck  
HM Inspector

20 April 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

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

- Pastoral care

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

- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

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

- Accommodation and facilities
- Structure of the curriculum
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Leadership
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- 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.

<b>What pleased parents and carers most</b>	<b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They felt welcome in the school.</li> <li>• The school had a good reputation in the community.</li> <li>• There was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> <li>• Staff encouraged pupils to work to the best of their ability.</li> <li>• Their child enjoyed being in school and was treated fairly.</li> <li>• Parents' evenings were helpful and informative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about the standards expected in the school.</li> <li>• Advice about how to help their child with learning at home.</li> <li>• Closer involvement when decisions were made about their child.</li> <li>• The information given to them about the school's priorities.</li> <li>• The school building.</li> </ul>
<b>What pleased pupils most</b>	<b>What pupils would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were helped when they were stuck.</li> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly.</li> <li>• Teachers listened to them.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could.</li> <li>• They felt safe and well looked after.</li> <li>• They were helped to keep safe and healthy.</li> <li>• Teachers checked their homework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework.</li> <li>• Advice about who might help if they were upset.</li> <li>• The behaviour of pupils.</li> </ul>
<b>What pleased staff most</b>	<b>What staff would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The links established with the community.</li> <li>• The attention given to pupils' care and welfare.</li> <li>• The mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> <li>• The celebration of pupils' success.</li> <li>• Constructive feedback to pupils.</li> <li>• The school's approach to dealing with bullying.</li> </ul>	<p>Teaching staff wanted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater involvement in the decision-making process.</li> <li>• improved communication between management and staff.</li> <li>• improved communication with all staff.</li> <li>• discussion about school priorities.</li> </ul> <p>Most support staff had no significant concerns but would welcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a greater involvement in the decision-making process.</li> </ul>

## 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](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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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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