

**St Mary's Primary School
Alexandria
West Dunbartonshire Council
24 February 2004**

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1. Background

St Mary's Primary School was inspected in November 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. Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents and P4 to P7 pupils and to all staff. Further information about responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team met with the chairperson of the School Board and with a group of parents.

The school is a denominational school serving the town of Alexandria. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 258. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was also in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher including the high quality advice and guidance provided to the school, and the very effective work of the deputy headteacher.
- The friendliness and politeness of the pupils.
- The high quality of interactive teaching across the school and the valuable contribution of all support staff to the work of the school.
- The extensive range of information for parents about pupils' programmes, learning and personal and social development.
- The different ways in which the local community and environment were used to enhance pupils' learning.
- The effective and successful system for school improvement through audit, review and development.

3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff

Almost all parents, pupils and staff were very pleased with all aspects of the school. All parents thought the school had a good reputation in the community, that teachers set high standards for their child's education and that the school was well led. All pupils enjoyed being at the school. They thought the school helped them to keep safe and healthy and they felt well looked after in the school. All staff thought there was mutual respect between themselves and pupils and that the school dealt very effectively with any instances of indiscipline. All staff thought the school was well led and staff

were very appreciative of the quality of support they received from the headteacher. Teachers valued her advice and guidance.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The quality of the curriculum was very good. Teachers, together with senior managers, effectively monitored time allocated to each curriculum area to ensure that pupils had access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The school was continuing to review and improve programmes, most recently in environmental studies, technology and religious and moral education. A comprehensive learning and teaching policy provided very good guidance to teachers and enabled pupils to experience consistency in teaching approaches. Commendably, parents were very well informed about programmes through a series of guides which included information about class topics in environmental studies and other key aspects such as the development of reading skills. Pupils at P6 and P7 studied French.

Most aspects of learning and teaching were very good. Teachers were very effective at giving explanations to classes, groups and individuals, and they questioned pupils skilfully. They used effective interactive teaching approaches in all areas of the curriculum, and in mathematics this work was of a high quality. Homework was well planned, set regularly and involved parents well in their child's learning. Pupils were well behaved, motivated and enthusiastic learners. In almost all lessons, the pace of learning provided an appropriate level of challenge for pupils. Pupils were developing their information and communications technology (ICT) skills well. At the early stages, they were able to use draw packages and, in P6 and P7, pupils used ICT to develop further their skills in language and mathematics. Pupils made good progress when they were responsible for their own learning, for instance working in groups on technology projects. The school should develop further opportunities for pupils to be more independent in their learning.

Pupils showed good knowledge of their local community through being involved in a series of field trips and visits, including to the local library and Loch Lomond National Park. Through a variety of approaches, the school was promoting effectively active learning by pupils. At various points in the day, pupils benefited from classroom 'warm-up' exercises which resulted in them being physically and mentally alert and prepared them to learn effectively. Pupils participated in a health and fitness programme provided by support staff together with the deputy headteacher. Pupils took part in a wide range of after-school activities including athletics, art and improving presentation skills using ICT.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. There had been consistent improvement in standards in recent years. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Significant numbers of pupils were exceeding these levels. In the early stages, almost all pupils were making very good progress towards developing their literacy skills. At all stages, pupils listened well. By P7, pupils showed good discussion skills in groups and, throughout the school, pupils were able to talk well about their work to their own class. Pupils read well with clarity and fluency. At the upper stages, the school was planning to develop further pupils' ability to read and analyse text. At P2, all pupils were making very good progress in learning to write. Pupils wrote for a variety of purposes and most pupils wrote well in

imaginative writing. Across the school, pupils' spelling, handwriting and punctuation were of a high quality. Staff should take forward their plans to develop further the programmes for listening and talking and consistently make clear to pupils what they had to do to improve key ideas in their writing.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good. It had improved steadily over the last few years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in information handling, number, money and measurement and shape, position and movement. Throughout the school, significant numbers of pupils were exceeding these levels. Pupils in P1 and P2 were making rapid progress in acquiring mathematical skills. In the middle and upper stages, pupils had a well developed understanding of shapes. They could draw and interpret graphs accurately and were making good progress in using computers to handle data. They were generally very competent in mental and written calculation. By P7, pupils' understanding of decimals and fractions was well developed. They were unsure of some aspects such as calculating percentages. At all stages, pupils were learning to use a wide range of strategies in problem-solving and enquiry.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were very good. The school had a clear child protection policy based on the advice of the education authority. Staff had received appropriate training on child protection issues. Teachers set high standards for pupils' achievement and behaviour. They knew their pupils well and made good provision for their physical, social and emotional needs. All pupils felt safe in the school. The depute headteacher provided additional pastoral support for pupils and their families where necessary. Teachers used a wide range of strategies to recognise and reward good behaviour. In an example of good practice, the school had a system of reporting each month to parents on pupils' personal and social development (PSD) including attendance, effort and behaviour. The school successfully promoted healthy eating through a number of school initiatives, such as a healthy tuck shop.

Arrangements to support pupils' learning were very good. The school had well-organised systems to enable teachers to identify concerns about individual pupils' learning at an early stage. Teachers, including a network support and an early intervention teacher, and ancillary staff provided very effective support for pupils experiencing difficulties. At some stages, pupils were taught mathematics in mixed-class groupings based on their prior attainment. Teachers set high expectations and used praise well. In P4, a group of pupils was being given direct support by the depute headteacher. Through reading and acting out of plays, they were making good progress in developing their reading skills. Staff set very well-focused learning targets within individualised educational programmes for pupils with additional support needs. Pupils were making good progress to meet these targets. Effective links had been made with a wide range of support services, including an educational psychologist and a pupil support officer.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was good. Classrooms were bright and stimulating, though the school had limited space for additional teaching areas. The school operated a very effective display policy in classes and corridors. However, the display of pupils' writing was not sufficiently extensive. The school and the education authority had worked well together to maintain a pleasant environment for learning. They required to take forward plans to review aspects of health and safety. These related to hazardous steps within levels in the building, the storage of materials in the gym hall and the location of the dining hall.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and pupils were proud of their school. Relationships between staff and pupils were purposeful. The janitor, clerical assistant and support assistants made valuable contributions to the work of the school. Pupils were polite and well behaved. They showed consideration towards others. There was a strong sense of community within the school. Staff provided pupils with very good opportunities to become actively involved in the life of the school through the pupil council, the healthy tuck shop and buddies. The quality of teamwork among staff was very good. Staff, pupils and parents took part in fundraising events for school funds and charity. Regular assemblies provided good opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements and for religious observance. Through close links with the school's parish community of Our Lady and Saint Mark's, there were further opportunities for religious observance. The school promoted a sense of fairness and mutual respect. Staff planned to review the school's approaches to equality and fairness and should include the promotion of race equality and diversity in this activity.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had developed very productive partnerships with parents, the education authority and the wider community. The School Board and the Parent-Teacher Association were very supportive of the work of the school. Parent helpers assisted with outings and at sports day. Through parent guides, reading records and homework challenges, the school successfully encouraged parents to be involved in their child's learning. Links with the education authority were very good. Local priests, a nurse and community police were regular visitors to the school. The school made very good use of the local community to provide a stimulating learning environment.</p>

7. Improving the school

The school provided its pupils with a high standard of education. All staff were committed to sustaining improvement further. Pupils were making very good progress in their learning across most aspects of the curriculum and high standards of attainment in mathematics, reading and writing were being sustained and improved. There were examples of models of good practice in teaching in aspects of mathematics and English language. Pupils were motivated to learn through positive experiences in their lessons. Parents were very well informed about many aspects of learning in the school.

The headteacher provided outstanding leadership in promoting and managing the process of improving attainment of all pupils. She had the respect and confidence of staff, pupils and parents. She promoted a strong sense of teamwork within the school. Together with staff, she monitored and evaluated very effectively the strengths and development needs of the school, the attainment of pupils and the quality of learning and teaching. The school's system of planning for improvement was very successful in improving pupils' achievements in a number of areas.

The depute headteacher was making a very effective contribution to improving the school. She had led the successful development of the new environmental studies programme and, notably, ensured extensive use of the local community to enhance pupils' learning. Senior managers operated very well as a team.

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:

- develop further opportunities for pupils to be more independent and to take greater responsibility for their learning;
- take forward plans to audit and review equality and fairness, including the promotion of race equality and diversity; and
- maintain the school's successful commitment to sustaining improvement.

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 and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

David Watt
HM Inspector

24 February 2004

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be good

- Pupils' learning experiences
- Accommodation and facilities
- Equality and fairness

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. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all parents were very pleased with all aspects of the school. • All parents thought the school had a good reputation in the community. • All parents thought that if they raised a matter of concern the school would do something about it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant aspects of concern raised by parents.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all pupils were very pleased with all aspects of the school. • All pupils enjoyed being at this school. • All pupils felt well looked after and safe and that the school helped them to keep healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues of concern raised by pupils.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff thought the school was well led. • All staff thought that senior managers worked well as a team. • All staff liked working in this school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some support staff would like to see their staff training time being used more effectively.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Head of 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, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. 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 the above address. 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.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

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