



**St Michael's
Primary School
Dumbarton
West Dunbartonshire
Council
20 January 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents² and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term ‘school’ is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

St Michael's Primary School is a denominational school. It serves the Brucehill, Castlehill, Oxhill, West Castlehill, Westcliff and West Bridgend areas of Dumbarton. The inspection was carried out in November 2008 at which time the roll was 262. Children's attendance was below the national average in 2006-07. The school has the highest level of award in health promotion from the Council and a gold Eco-Schools Scotland award. A few children benefit from being in a nurture class called the *Sunshine Room*.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Arrangements for the transfer of children from the local nursery to primary.
- The commitment of all staff to the care, welfare and wellbeing of all children, their families and the wider school community.
- Welcoming ethos and quality of displays of children's work.
- Support for children with additional support needs and efforts made by staff to get it right for every child.
- Visionary leadership of the headteacher.

3. Examples of good practice

- Alternative approaches taken to make sure that every child is included.
- Involving parents through a cookery club.
- Use of information and communications technology (ICT), including the use of cartoons in English language lessons.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all children work very hard and enjoy their learning. They feel safe and very well cared for in school. They think that teachers listen to them. Children work well together in pairs and groups. Teachers now need to let children have more freedom of choice in their learning. Children are making very good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Their progress in listening and talking is improving. Children with additional support needs are making very good progress towards their own learning targets. At the early stages, children are beginning to write well. Children in P6 use ICT to create comic strips from their own photographs to enhance their writing. At P7, children talk confidently about their favourite books and know that reading will be important to them when they leave school. Children enjoy mathematics and are confident and successful using numbers. They can complete oral and written calculations well. Children at P4 had used ICT to help them draw graphs about food. In P5, they are skilled when using mathematics in real-life contexts. Teachers use computer games well to help increase children's mathematical skills. Children are developing a very good understanding of a healthy lifestyle. P1 children know which foods are healthy. Older children encourage younger children to eat healthy lunches.

Across the school, children have a range of activities in which they achieve. They are developing important skills of teamwork and leadership. The number of children taking part in after-school clubs, such as netball, cross-country and football is increasing. Children like playing Samba music. Children in P7 started a *St Michael's X Factor*. They run auditions sensitively and plan well. Children enjoy the many opportunities they have to perform in front of others and all children take part in Christmas shows or school concerts. The eco committee is developing a very pleasant eco garden and outdoor classroom. Commendably, children take gifts of freshly picked vegetables to the local care home. Catering staff include vegetables from the eco garden in school meals and children baked carrot cakes using

them. Children in the school traffic action group have written to the Council about their road safety concerns.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Teachers are beginning to develop well some of the aims of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Children are using skills they learn in literacy across the school, for example they have written poems about making healthy sandwiches. Teachers are working to further develop links within different areas of the curriculum. Children from the local nursery make an effective start to their learning because of the very strong arrangements to support their move to P1. Almost all teachers used ICT to improve children's learning in exciting contexts. Children can confidently use the Internet to find out answers to questions.

Staff identify children's learning needs very well. They work very hard to support individuals. A few higher achieving children require to be challenged more consistently by being given more difficult work. Teachers group children to match learning activities more effectively to children's abilities and needs, this is making a positive impact on their achievements. The school should continue to monitor this. Staff work very well with social work, the school nurse and the educational psychologist to help a few children learn better. The speech and language therapist has worked with teachers to talk about how to add speech and language targets into lessons. Learning assistants work very well with children requiring more help. An early intervention teacher provides very helpful support to the younger children. Children in the *Sunshine Room* are making very good progress with their personal and social skills. Staff provide a few children with a different curriculum from others in mainstream classes to help them stay in school.

5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

All staff work very well with parents and others to support learning. Parents are trained by staff to work very effectively in classes at the early stages to help children in their play. Members of the local community help with the eco garden. Staff have made contacts with local businesses which have helped with money to develop the eco garden. The Parent Council works well with the school to raise additional funds to support the work of the school. Staff work well with the local priest who visits the school several times each week. The catering manager works with parents to help them cook healthy food and improve the wellbeing of their families. These parents also help to create bags of learning activities for children to use at home. Staff work very effectively with active schools, dance and fitness teachers to help children learn to be fit and healthy. Parents are pleased that they can choose a time to meet with teachers about their children's progress. Parents think that teachers provide lots of helpful information in their child's report card.

6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

The pupil council has talked to children about the lunch menu and rota, fund-raising, and the new complaint procedure which they developed. A pupil council notice-board was set up in the dining hall to help them stay in touch better with others in the school. Children in P7 wrote a report which tells about the good things in the school and things they would like to see get better. All staff have been involved in helping to improve the school. Teachers have improved learning and teaching. They visit each others classrooms to share ideas and improve their own teaching. The Parent Council is keen to increase parent's involvement in their children's learning. Parents are asked what they think is good about the school and also where the school could be further improved. Children, staff and parents are all actively contributing to changes which are making the school much better.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

The school is very welcoming and children are happy. All staff have high expectations of children's achievement and behaviour. Children's achievements are celebrated and displayed around the school. Staff try very hard to put into action the school motto of "We shall serve" to the children, their families and the community. They work very effectively to make sure that everyone is included and achieving. All staff are trained to protect children. Children care for each other and feel valued. They are polite, very well mannered and can express themselves with confidence. They know that not all children are treated the same as some need more help than others. They think that this is fair and willingly contribute to that support. Children share their hopes for the day with each other at daily morning prayers. There are appropriate arrangements for religious observance.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

Children, staff and parents developed a new vision for the school which was shared at the last prize-giving. The pupil council created their own pupil values. The headteacher is a visionary leader who knows her school very well. She is very well supported by a deputy headteacher. The principal teachers who share a post carry out their responsibilities very effectively. All managers are very good class teachers. Individual class teachers lead aspects of the school well, for example, in the development of ICT and through a health working group. A class teacher is leading changes to education about money and has worked with the Dumbarton Credit Union to set up *St Michael's Super Savers Club*. Staff teamwork is very strong. They want to make a difference. The school is very well placed to continue to improve.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the quality of self-evaluation leading to improvement in the school, we disengaged early from the inspection. We will make no further visits following this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Further develop children's skills and abilities to work on their own and in groups, to make more choices and plan their own learning.
- Continue to take forward the aims of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for St Michael's Primary School.

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	very good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

Elizabeth Morrison
HM Inspector
20 January 2009

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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