



**St Sylvester's RC  
Primary School  
Elgin  
The Moray Council  
15 December 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents<sup>1</sup>, children and the local community know whether their school<sup>2</sup> provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which children are involved. We also gather the views of children, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well children are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support children. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from children, parents and staff. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends

<sup>2</sup> The term 'school' includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate

## **Contents**

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Examples of good practice
4. How well do children learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?
6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

### **1. The school**

St Sylvester's RC Primary School is a denominational school. It serves Elgin and surrounding areas. The roll was 184 when the inspection was carried out in October 2009. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- The quality of learning throughout the school.
- Enthusiastic, motivated children who achieve very well.
- The success of staff in meeting the needs of children.
- Partnerships with parents and other professionals.
- The involvement of all staff in leadership roles and improving the school.
- The headteacher's clear vision and leadership to improve children's learning experiences.

## **3. Examples of good practice**

- Developing an outdoor play area to meet the needs of all children.
- Children leading learning to develop partnership with parents.
- Improving self-evaluation through coaching.

## **4. How well do children learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Children at all stages are happy and safe in school. They enjoy learning and work hard on their tasks and activities. They work well independently and together in groups. They particularly enjoy challenges set by their teachers which make them think for

themselves. Children can talk about their progress and their strengths as learners. They now need to work with teachers to identify their own next steps in learning. Children are becoming increasingly responsible and all contribute actively to the life of the school and the wider community.

Children achieve well in a wide variety of activities, including through a range of lunch time and after-school activities. Children have a clear understanding of environmental issues and, as a result, the school has achieved a silver Eco-Schools Scotland award. Older children have trained in techniques to resolve conflict and they use these skills effectively in the playground. Children in the choir perform very well and a significant number of children learn to play musical instruments. Commendably, the school monitors children's achievement well. Staff ensure that all children have opportunities to develop confidence and improve their learning skills through out-of-class activities.

Across the primary stages, children's progress in English language is very good and in mathematics progress is good. In recent years, standards of attainment have remained high. Almost all children achieve appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and mathematics. Most achieve these levels in writing. Most achieve these levels earlier than expected in reading and the majority do so in writing. Almost all children talk and express their views with confidence. Children at the early stages are making very good progress in acquiring early literacy skills. At all stages, children enjoy books and can summarise what they have read. They can describe how authors use language to create effects. Children write enthusiastically and at length for a range of purposes. They are developing good skills in punctuation and spelling. At the upper stages, handwriting needs to be improved. Children who are learning English as an additional language are making very good progress. Over the last three years attainment in mathematics has steadily improved. At the early stages, almost all pupils are attaining levels early. Most children undertake number, money and measurement tasks accurately. Children have a secure understanding of the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects.

The school should continue to develop the use of information and communications technology to support learning in mathematics. Skills in handling information through the creation of spreadsheets, databases and the drawing of graphs are not developed well enough.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

Staff have started to review the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. The school provides a broad curriculum which includes all subject areas. The curriculum is enriched by visiting specialists. Teachers make good use of the local environment and involve visitors to the school to develop pupils' enthusiasm and interest in learning. They now need to help children link their learning across subjects. Children do not yet experience two hours of high-quality physical education weekly. Staff at the early years work very effectively with pre-school centres to ensure children build on what they have learned in their nursery class. Staff have taken positive steps to improve continuity in learning as children move to secondary school. They need to continue to work in partnership with local secondary schools to achieve further improvements.

Across all classes, teachers know children very well and plan activities and tasks to meet their needs. The school meets the needs of a wide range of children very effectively using approaches that ensure all children are included in the life of the school. Staff share with children what they are going to learn, check their progress and give them helpful feedback on their work. Classroom assistants provide valuable support for individuals and groups of children. The support for learning teacher and class teachers plan together successfully to meet children's particular learning needs. The support for learning teacher has drawn up helpful plans to ensure coordination of support to meet children's needs. The pastoral care teacher and support for learning teacher evaluate the impact of strategies to support children. Teachers provide regular and well-planned homework.

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

Staff and parents work very well together to support children's learning. Children at P7 share what they are learning very effectively with parents by taking on the role of teachers and taking their parents through lessons. Parents find open days very helpful. Staff work very effectively with other services to meet children's learning needs. They plan very well together to find solutions to challenges so that children can achieve their best. The school is very thorough in its investigation of parents' concerns or complaints. Staff work very effectively with the local priests to develop the school as a strong community of faith.

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

Staff are strongly committed to the school. They work successfully together as a team to achieve improvement. They evaluate consistently what they do both in their individual classrooms and as a whole school. The headteacher knows the school very well. She regularly evaluates children's learning experiences and talks to them about their learning. She meets with staff to discuss learning and the progress children are making. Children are actively involved in improving the school. The pupil council gathers the views of all children and takes action which makes the school better. Children and support staff worked very well together to improve the playground.

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

All members of the school community, children, parents and staff, respect each other. Children behave very well and enjoy playing and learning together. Staff provide extra nurturing activities for children who experience difficulties being in school. The school has appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Children develop respect for other cultures and religions through the religious and moral education programme, and through their international links project. The school promotes healthy lifestyles and children can describe what

they need to do to stay healthy. All staff understand their responsibilities for protecting children. The provision for meeting children's emotional, physical and social needs is of very high quality.

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

The whole school community, led by the headteacher, has developed a vision for the school based on shared values. The vision and values are embedded in all aspects of life in the school and are demonstrated consistently by staff. The headteacher is very well respected by children, parents and staff. She has inspired staff to work together effectively towards achieving the best for children. The principal teachers and all staff work very effectively as a team to improve the school. Under the headteacher's leadership, and with the strong commitment of staff and parents, the school is very well placed to continue to improve.

## **9. What happens next?**

The inspection team was able to rely on the school's self-evaluation to make its evaluations and the school agreed with these evaluations at an early stage of the inspection. As a result, the inspection team was able to change its focus during the inspection to help the school plan to improve even more. The school provides a very good quality of education. Therefore, we will make no further visits in connection with 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 school.

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

- Continue to improve the curriculum, taking account of *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 Sylvester's RC Primary School.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>very good</b>

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

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>very good</b>

**HM Inspector:** Christine Knight  
15 December 2009

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

If you would like to find out more about our inspections or get an electronic copy of this report, please go to [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation, or if you wish to comment about any aspect of our inspections. You can contact us at [HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk) or write to us at BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk) or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Where the school has a nursery class, you can contact the Complaints Coordinator, Headquarters, Care Commission, Compass House, Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY, telephone 0845 603 0890.

Crown Copyright 2009  
HM Inspectorate of Education