

**St Margaret's RC Primary
School
Stirling Council**

22 January 2002

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in St Margaret's RC Primary School Stirling Council

1. Introduction

St Margaret's RC Primary School, Cowie was inspected in September 2001 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated how well pupils were performing, the effectiveness of the school and how well the school was managed.

HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, mathematics, and music within expressive arts.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents. A member of the inspection team also met the Chairperson of the School Board and the school chaplains.

2. The school

The school is a denominational school which serves the village of Cowie near Stirling and its immediate area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 99 pupils, organised in five classes.

Parents' views

Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire were very satisfied with the work of the school.

All thought that:

- the school was well led and had a good reputation;
- teachers set high standards for attainment; and
- children were well cared for, treated fairly and that parental concerns were followed up.

Parents met by the inspection team expressed concerns about road safety and the condition of the exterior of the building but no other recurring problems were identified.

Ethos

The school had a good ethos. Pupils wore their school uniform with pride. Relationships with teachers and other staff were generally very positive and constructive. Weekly assemblies provided very good, inclusive opportunities to raise pupils' self-esteem by rewarding achievements of individuals and house teams. Good morale among staff and pupils was reflected in the welcome given to parents and visitors. A pupil council encouraged pupils to become involved in their own education. Staff organised after-school clubs for drama, netball, computing and art. Religious observance was integral to school life, highlighted by daily prayers and celebratory masses for religious festivals and supported by the school chaplains. Attendance was slightly below the national average.

School and community

The school had established very good communication with parents, other schools, educational support services, other services and the wider community. The school was involved in the council's New Community Schools Initiative.

- Parents' evenings, curriculum workshops, annual reports on pupils and regular newsletters helped to

keep parents informed about and involved in their children's education.

- The School Board provided much appreciated support and parents had raised funds to support the school and other agencies.
- Some parents gave direct assistance, for example by helping in the lending library.
- A good spirit of partnership was in place with other services, external groups and agencies, including the local police.
- Arrangements for receiving and transferring pupils were thoughtful and effective.
- Curriculum links with the secondary school were very well developed. A new project, the Cowie Initiative, was bringing the two local primary schools closer together, in partnership with psychological, social work, community and health services, and with the community.

Accommodation

Overall the accommodation was good. Proper attention was given to security during the school day. The building was well appointed internally but the exterior was in need of redecoration. The outdoor play area was spacious, though some maintenance was necessary to exploit its full potential. In addition to the attractive classrooms, the school had a library, a literacy/numeracy room, a resources room and a good-sized gymnasium/dining hall.

Staffing and resources

The school's staffing was very good, with a range of experience and expertise among teachers. All of the other staff provided very good support for the school.

Resources were good overall. They were organised to make them accessible to pupils and staff. Additional

materials were required for music and aspects of English language. There were plans to network the school's computers and provide additional hardware.

The headteacher's management of devolved finance was well handled to address appropriate priorities.

3. How well are pupils performing?

English language In English language, the overall quality of attainment was fair. While most pupils coped well with classwork, they needed more consistent challenge to achieve higher standards. P1-P3 pupils were making very good progress with early literacy skills. Almost all P4 pupils were attaining appropriate national targets in reading, talking and listening and most had achieved these targets in writing. At P7, most pupils were attaining appropriate national targets in reading and listening. The majority achieved these targets in talking and less than half in writing. Most pupils listened well to stories and instructions, talked confidently about their class work and read with understanding. However, pupils at the upper stages lacked skill in talking about texts, participating in group discussions and writing for a variety of purposes. Handwriting and presentation of work were good overall. Pupils were developing word processing skills, and P6 and P7 could modify and illustrate texts. Younger pupils accessed computer programs related to the reading scheme.

Mathematics The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Almost all pupils in P4 and the majority in P7 were attaining appropriate national targets in *information handling, number, money and measurement and shape, position and movement*. Commendably, the majority of pupils were attaining the levels expected for P3 before the end of P2. Classwork was suitably challenging and most pupils coped with tasks set. Across the school,

pupils had a secure understanding of information handling and shape, position and movement. They were developing oral and mental skills for mental calculations. Some pupils could draw on a range of strategies to solve problems. Pupils' skills in using information and communications technology (ICT) for mathematical purposes needed to be developed further, although pupils from P1 onwards were able to access programs relating to number work.

Music

In music, the overall quality of pupils' attainment was good. In the early stages, pupils sang enthusiastically, listened and responded well to musical excerpts, and showed the ability to investigate and invent their own sounds. Pupils in P5/6 showed some familiarity with a range of modern musical styles, listened well and sang tunefully. Pupils in P6/7, who had just started learning the recorder, played accurately from notation. They also showed some ability to invent short musical phrases on tuned percussion instruments.

4. How good is the curriculum?

The school's curriculum was suitably broad and generally well balanced. There was a particular emphasis on literacy in the early years and on developing pupils' skills in mental calculations in mathematics at all stages. Throughout the school, pupils had opportunities to develop ICT skills and the school had plans to extend this provision. Pupils from P5 to P7 were learning French.

English language

The programme for English language was fair. It provided coverage of listening, talking, reading and writing but some key aspects required further attention. The programme at the early stages placed appropriate emphasis on reading and writing skills. However, the overall school programme should be revised to give pupils more opportunities for developing skills in group

discussion, talking about texts and writing for different purposes. Teachers needed more detailed guidance about what children should learn and how their work should be assessed.

Mathematics

The programme for mathematics was good. Balanced attention was given to information handling, number, money and measurement and shape, position and movement. Good emphasis was given to developing pupils' skills in mental calculation. A more consistent approach to problem solving and to the use of ICT for mathematical purposes should be built into the programme.

Music

The programme for music was good. Teachers made good use of broadcast materials to provide opportunities for progression in listening, performing and inventing. Guidelines on the use of these materials were required to help new teachers. Recorder tuition was provided for all P6/7 pupils and selected pupils had the chance to learn guitar or chanter from specialist music instructors.

Expressive arts

The programme for expressive arts was good overall. Appropriate provision for learning and teaching was made for art and design, music and physical education. Attention to drama was less systematic. The school made good use of opportunities for visiting specialist staff from the MacRobert Arts Centre to work with staff and pupils in drama and music. A full review of the programme for expressive arts was scheduled for 2002-04.

5. How good is learning and teaching?

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Most of the lessons seen were good or very good. There were major weaknesses in one lesson. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

Generally teachers planned their work well but, in English language, plans did not focus sufficiently on what pupils were expected to learn. Teachers regularly assessed pupils' progress but there was a need for more clarity about what should be recorded for each curriculum area and how progress should be reported to parents. Teachers' good judgements about pupils' learning during lessons were not being used systematically enough to identify next steps in learning. The school should further develop arrangements for assessment and reporting in order to monitor pupils' progress across all areas of the curriculum, and use the information to provide feedback about how pupils might improve their learning. The headteacher monitored the use of national tests in English language and mathematics for each pupil.

Features of learning and teaching were as follows:

- lessons were generally well structured to meet the needs of most pupils;
- in almost all classes, teachers made effective use of direct teaching with individuals, groups and the whole class. Teachers gave clear explanations, used effective questioning techniques and made appropriate use of praise to motivate pupils; and
- overall, the quality of pupils' learning was good with most pupils concentrating and co-operating well. In one class at the middle stages, poor behaviour by some pupils distracted the class.

6. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare Staff gave very good attention to pupils' care and welfare. They knew pupils well and responded sensitively to their needs. Appropriate policies were in place for child protection, the encouragement of positive behaviour and the prevention of bullying.

Personal and social development

Across the school, staff contributed positively to pupils' personal and social development through good class management, after school clubs and giving pupils appropriate responsibilities. Circle time was used to promote pupils' confidence and encourage concern and respect for others. Pupils' self-esteem was also enhanced by participation in school shows and the pupil council. Health promotion was encouraged through a programme of activities which gave good attention to diet, personal safety, hygiene, drugs and sex education.

Support for learning

The overall quality of support for learning was fair. Class teachers knew their pupils well and planned to meet their needs by building on prior learning. Support for learning assistants and the nursery nurse offered good support to individuals and groups. Arrangements for specialist learning support across the school were not securely in place at the time of the inspection. The time available from specialist support staff had recently been committed to the Cowie Initiative Literacy Project to raise attainment in reading at P5 to P7. The quality of support observed within the context of that initiative was good. Interim provision was being arranged for learning support across the school. Some pupils had individualised educational programmes (IEPs) but, in line with the council's staged intervention policy, IEPs should be drawn up for all pupils with significant learning difficulties. As change was underway, it would be timely to review the overall arrangements for supporting pupils' learning, including the role to be played by the senior teacher and the use of IEPs.

7. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The headteacher's good leadership was highly regarded by parents, teachers, pupils and the wider community. In her five years in post, she had established clear aims to

improve attainment for all pupils within an ethos of achievement and was taking the school forward. Her commitment had raised pupils' self-esteem, developed good, supportive teamwork among staff and forged strong links with parents, the School Board and the local church. She should now give increased priority to guiding staff at all stages on the development and implementation of curriculum programmes and maintaining the focus on raising attainment.

The senior teacher had responsibilities for co-ordinating work at the early years and the arrangements for learning support across the school. She had created good teamwork at the early stages, liaised effectively with local nurseries and the home/school link officer and had planned successful induction days and workshops for parents. Her role in learning support should be reconsidered as part of an overall review of the support for learning arrangements. The review should take account of the time she would need to fulfil both roles effectively.

Staff development and review

A good range of staff development was planned for each year and most activities were overtaken successfully. The activities were chosen to meet the needs of staff and to address priorities in the school development plan. All teaching staff had been reviewed as part of the authority's arrangements for staff review and the system was working well.

School development planning

The headteacher had involved all staff in the production of the school development plan. The aims and audit sections were clearly linked to the identified priorities to produce a good but ambitious plan. In previous years, some priorities had not been addressed. A good start had been made to implementing the current plan.

Approaches to improving quality

The school's arrangements for quality assurance were good. The headteacher provided teachers with helpful feedback on teaching plans and had recently introduced a

programme of regular visits to classes. Aspects of the school's work were audited by all staff using national performance indicators and the evaluations were used to identify development priorities. The school was beginning to track pupils' progress in English language and mathematics more closely and as a result had identified the need to improve attainment in the middle stages.

8. How well does the school perform overall?

The school was providing a good standard of education for its wide range of pupils. The quality of learning and teaching was good and links with parents and the wider community were very good. Most pupils identified strongly with the school and came to classes ready to work. Some aspects of attainment were good and were improving. The school's plans for development were clearly aimed at extending this success to all stages and programmes.

Key strengths

- The positive ethos and very good pastoral care.
- The leadership of the headteacher and the hard work and commitment of teachers and other staff.
- Very good attainment in English language and mathematics in P1 to P3.
- The very good mutual support and partnership with parents, the School Board and the local church.
- The good quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

Main points for action

- The headteacher should give increased priority to guiding staff on the development and implementation of curriculum programmes and maintaining the focus on raising attainment.

- The programme for English language should be revised to give pupils more opportunities for developing skills in group discussion, talking about texts and writing for different purposes and audiences.
- A more consistent approach to problem solving and to the use of ICT for mathematical purposes should be integrated into the mathematics programme.
- The school should further develop arrangements for assessment and reporting to monitor pupils' progress across all areas of the curriculum and use the information to inform parents.
- The arrangements for supporting pupils' learning should be reviewed, including use of individualised educational programmes.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Jim Dignan
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Eastern Division

22 January 2002

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Communication with parents
- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- Provision of staff

We judged the following to be good

- The school's ethos
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Provision of materials and equipment
- The school's management of devolved finances
- The structure of the curriculum
- Quality of courses or programmes
- Quality of teachers' planning
- Quality of the teaching process
- Quality of pupils' learning
- Matching the teaching process to pupils' needs and experience
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work
- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

We judged the following to be fair

- Using assessment to guide the teaching process
- Effectiveness of the learning support

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 48% of cases, good in 36%, fair in 12% and unsatisfactory in 4%.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Children's Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 0131 244 8079. Copies are also available on our web site: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

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 Dr Gill Robinson, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

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