

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW
ST CATHERINE'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

MAY 2008

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

St Catherine's RC Primary School is a denominational primary school built in 1966 which serves the area of east Edinburgh. The school catchment area comprises the areas of Gracemount and Burdiehouse.

The current school roll is 144. There are seven classes in the school. Nineteen district pupils and 5 non-district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2007. The pupil teacher ratio is 14:1.

The absence rate for 2006–2007 was 32 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 18. There were no formal exclusions during the period.

The pupil unit cost for 2006–2007 was £4241, compared to authority and national averages of £3228 and £3422 respectively. There is a Parent Council and parent teacher association (PTA).

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

The school's current performance in relation to national 5–14 attainment is:

	2005	2006	2007
Reading	70%	75%	71%
Writing	68%	70%	57%
Mathematics	66%	73%	71%

REVIEW PROCEDURES

St Catherine's RC Primary School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Development and Neighbourhood Management Groups of the Children and Families Department during January 2008. An experienced practitioner from another school in the city was also part of the review team. The review was based on the quality indicators in *How good is our school?* 3.

The review was based on two focus areas both of which included aspects of leadership and equalities:

- ✿ learning and teaching; and
- ✿ partnerships in learning.

The members of the review team made their evaluation on the basis of evidence provided by the school and their own observations.

In order to make their evaluation, the team consulted a number of school documents, including the improvement plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 15 lessons were observed. A questionnaire was issued to a 20% sample of parents.

Thirty one questionnaires were sent to parents of school pupils and 12 were returned. Thirty questionnaires were sent to parents in the nursery class and four were returned.

Verbal questionnaires were carried out with sample groups of pupils.

PARENTS' / CARERS' VIEWS

- ✿ All school and nursery parents agreed that their child enjoyed being at school, that they found the activities stimulating and challenging and that if their child was having difficulty he/she would be helped. All parents were satisfied with the homework that their child received and that if they raised a matter of concern the school would do something about it. All parents also said that pupils were generally well-behaved. Some parents felt that teachers did not always deal effectively with bad behaviour.
- ✿ All school and nursery parents agreed that the school had explained what part they could play in their child's education, that the school was good at explaining its work to them and that they came away from parent-staff meetings feeling that they had learned something useful. All parents also said that the school was well led, had good accommodation and a good reputation in the local community.

PUPILS' VIEWS

- ✿ All pupils spoke of their enjoyment at being in school and were confident that if they were encountering difficulties then they would be helped. They spoke positively about the way in which teachers supported them in class with their learning. Teachers explained things clearly and encouraged them to try their best. All pupils believed that their ideas were listened to and that they had a say in deciding how to improve the school.
- ✿ A few pupils felt that the behaviour of some pupils was not always good in class and that this could impact on the classroom learning of others.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The review team considered the following quality indicators from 'How good is our school? 3':

- 2.1 Learners experiences
- 5.2 Teaching for effective learning
- 5.3 Meeting learning needs
- 5.4 Assessment for learning
- 9.2 Leadership and direction

Overall learning and teaching was considered to be satisfactory.

Strengths in learning and teaching

Most pupils were well motivated and actively involved in their own learning and development. They contributed very positively to the life of the school and the wider community. Pupils across the school took responsibility for others through the buddy system and the excellent peer mediation initiative allowed P7 and P6 pupils to become more confident and provided additional support for a number of their peers. Most pupils, including those at risk of missing out and those who were vulnerable, had made good progress from their prior levels of attainment and wider achievement.

All pupils' views were regularly sought through class and school councils, engagement in various project groups and questionnaires and discussions with staff. Pupils felt that they were listened to and that their contributions were valued and taken into account in the school's decision-making process. All pupils clearly felt that they were treated with equality, fairness and respect.

The learning environment throughout the school was very positive and purposeful and provided a stimulating climate for learning and teaching. Classrooms and corridors contained many high quality displays of pupils' work which contributed effectively to making the school an inspiring place in which to learn.

Almost all staff shared the purposes of lessons with pupils. However, on some occasions, these were not always effectively reinforced during or revisited at the end of the lesson. Most teachers used a varied range of questioning techniques and pupils were encouraged to express their own views and ask questions. Feedback, including praise, was used to good effect by most staff to promote learning.

In the majority of classes tasks and activities were differentiated to take account of the learning needs of individual pupils. Learning activities were provided for pupils in ability groups to enable them to maximise their progress. Tasks and activities were generally well planned and involved pupils as effective contributors who took responsibility for some aspects of their own learning and their relationships with others. The planning of learning and teaching approaches reflected developments in line with Curriculum for Excellence.

Pupils were developing skills to evaluate their own work and the work of others. They were at the early stages of discussing how to improve the quality of their work and identifying their next

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steps in learning. Good use of peer assessment was noted in some classes.

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning and teaching was being developed in the school. There was a Smartboard in every classroom, including the nursery, and the school was making good use of the curricular software package 'EducationCity.com'. From the beginning of session 2007-2008 a dedicated ICT room had provided a base for the teaching of ICT skills and knowledge and staff and pupil time had been allocated for this purpose. The impact of this initiative had still to be evaluated.

Visiting specialist staff, including the active schools' coordinator and music instructors, had enriched the educational experiences for pupils.

The support for learning teacher had worked very effectively with class teachers, parents and pupils and had prepared appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils who required them. She had established a very good balance of withdrawing pupils from class to work individually or in small groups and working with pupils in class. Learning assistants also provided very valuable support for pupils in all classes. Pupils and families from ethnic minority backgrounds received good support from the English as an additional language (EAL) service. Effective liaison had occurred between the class teachers and the EAL teacher.

The school had established an effective system for recording and monitoring the pupils' progress. This system was used to predict possible outcomes for the pupils and had provided a basis for staff discussion with pupils and their parents. Parents received regular and up-to-date information, including written reports, on their child's progress.

The headteacher (HT) ably shared a strategic vision for the school which focused appropriately on the pupils' achievements and on developing a community of faith. Together with the principal teacher, he monitored learning and teaching and provided helpful feedback to all staff. A culture where almost all staff felt able and confident to take lead roles, within and beyond the classroom, had successfully been established. Staff displayed a professional and personal commitment to improving the school.

Finance had been linked directly to learning and teaching. Effective arrangements were in place to allocate monies to progress priorities in the school's improvement plan, for example, the purchase of new reading materials to tackle different genre and the new outdoor play area for children in the nursery.

Areas for development in learning and teaching

The school should audit current practice and update its learning and teaching policy. Staff should share current good practice and develop more consistent approaches to the use of assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching. In particular staff should further develop the use of assessment to identify and share next steps in learning with pupils.

The school should continue to build on the active learning experiences being introduced in P1 and plan for active learning opportunities at all stages in the school.

The school should review its arrangements for meeting the learning needs of all pupils. In particular it should examine the pace of learning to ensure that all pupils are sufficiently challenged.

The school should revisit the school homework policy and staff should look to plan home-learning activities from a whole-school perspective.

2 PARTNERSHIPS IN LEARNING

The review team considered the following quality indicators from 'How good is our school? 3':

- 4.1 The school's success in working with and engaging with the local community
- 5.7 Partnerships with learners and parents
- 9.3 Developing people and partnerships

Overall partnerships in learning was considered to be very good.

Strengths in partnerships in learning

The HT and staff had developed very good links with the local community. Many members of the local community were actively involved with the school to enrich the learning experience of the pupils. Links with the Parish of St Catherine's were particularly strong and pupils had attended special Masses at the local church and church representatives were frequent visitors to the school to contribute to school assemblies and religious education lessons. Gracemount Leisure Centre and the local library were regularly visited by pupils to broaden their learning experience and make effective use of the excellent resources available at these local centres. In addition many members of local community groups and organisations, including the community police, fire service and health service, had come into school to work effectively with the pupils and staff. A visit to the Scottish Parliament was the culmination of work on citizenship which had involved the local MSP speaking to pupils on a number of occasions.

Links with other schools, in both the Holy Rood and Gracemount clusters, were also very well established and contributed significantly to the pupils' learning experience and had engendered a very strong feeling of community. For example pupils and staff had had a lead role in organising a very successful community project which saw the Maasai warriors perform at Gracemount High School and school council members had been

involved in producing a cluster gospel CD as part of the excellent Holy Rood RC High School council initiative. Links with St John Vianney RC Primary School were particularly strong and this had resulted in a number of joint ventures including a foreign ski trip for P6 and P7 pupils and a Christmas carol concert. Collaborative working between the two schools had also extended to joint arrangements for some staff continuing professional development (CPD).

Excellent partnership arrangements had been established with a wide range of partner agencies and statutory organisations. These included Place2Be, Children First, Burdiehouse behaviour support base, Working Together, EAL and health agencies. Representatives of agencies working with the school to support individuals and groups of pupils felt very welcome and were comfortable about contributing and making suggestions. They recognised the work being done for vulnerable pupils and praised the school's approach to working in partnership with them to achieve positive outcomes for these pupils and their families.

Partnerships with parents, including the new Parent Council, were very good. Parents felt that the school had a good reputation in the local community and that it promoted and delivered a high quality inclusive service for children. Parents were involved in reviewing the work of the school and had been consulted on new policies and procedures, for example positive behaviour. Parents felt that their views were listened to and welcomed the feedback they received from the school. The school had clear complaints procedures in place and had produced a concise information leaflet to ensure parents understood how to use them. The PTA had regularly raised funds and supported relevant social activities and events. In addition parents and friends of the school had been responsible for significant improvements in the

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school playground which had greatly facilitated the opportunities to extend pupils' outdoor play.

The school was very welcoming. It had recently improved the layout and appearance of the entrance foyer and had established a school and community notice board with a wide variety of information leaflets readily available. The school had communicated effectively with parents and members of the local community through regular newsletters, parents' evenings and use of email. Parents' consultation evenings were very well attended. Arrangements for consultation meetings between staff and parents were flexible and, as far as possible, staff met parents at times which were most convenient to them. A number of parents' events had had a particular theme and these had successfully involved parents and members of the local community in looking at different aspects of the work of the school. These events had included healthy eating options, the school behaviour policy, a P1 alphabet play morning, a school talent show and a workshop session on the new Parent Council. The HT maintained a high profile at the beginning and end of the school day and operated an effective 'open door' policy which had enabled him to monitor parental views on an informal basis. He had engaged very well with parents and had successfully gained their trust. The school had promoted a very positive culture of engagement.

A very clear collegiate approach to school development had been established. All staff felt very strongly that they had been involved in the decision-making process. The HT had very good interpersonal skills which he had used to build staff and pupil confidence. Commendably, all staff were encouraged to take on leadership roles. Support staff and teaching staff effectively led many aspects of work in the school including resource management, curriculum developments and audits of key areas. They felt well supported in these roles by the HT and

principal teacher and felt that their contribution was valued by all staff. The pupil council had made effective contributions to the decision-making processes within the school, including the design and layout of the playground and the purchase of playground equipment. Pupils had taken responsibility for others through the buddy system and the peer mediation initiative. A strong ethos of teamwork was evident throughout the school.

Areas for development in partnerships in learning

The school should continue to encourage parents to be involved in their child's learning and the life of the school. In particular the school should take steps to encourage increased participation of parents in supporting homework.

Opportunities should continue to be developed to ensure effective joint planning and evaluation of curricular liaison with the associated primary schools.

The school should consider how learning assistants could be more fully involved in the development of active learning throughout the school.

The school should evaluate team performance against agreed objectives and so ensure that the full impact of all collaborative working is clearly evident.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ Confident and responsible pupils who contribute effectively to the school and community.
- ✿ The commitment of staff to continuous improvement.
- ✿ Excellent collaborative working with community organisations and partner agencies.

- ✿ The effective leadership of the HT and the principal teacher in building and sustaining very positive working relationships.
- ✿ The strong ethos of teamwork evident throughout the school.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ The school should review and update its learning and teaching policy. This should include a clear whole school framework for the use of formative assessment strategies across all stages to ensure consistency and cohesion.
- ✿ The school should review its arrangements for meeting the learning needs of all pupils. In particular it should examine the pace of learning to ensure that all pupils are sufficiently challenged.
- ✿ The school should continue to introduce active learning opportunities at all stages in the school.
- ✿ The school should formalise its evaluation of teamwork and partnership working and so ensure that the full impact of all collaborative working is evident.

CONCLUSION

The school's performance in the focus areas of learning and teaching and partnerships in learning was satisfactory and very good respectively.

The school will be supported to produce an action plan to meet the main recommendations in this report and a progress report will be requested the following session.

Duncan Lauder
Senior Quality Improvement Officer
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