

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

ST MARK'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL

MAY 2005

EDINBURGH
THE UNIVERSITY OF

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

St Mark's RC Primary School is a denominational primary school built in 1967 which serves the area of south east Edinburgh. The catchment area comprises of middle class, working class and unemployed. There is a variety of housing.

St Mark's RC Primary School has seven classes and a nursery class. The school building includes a hall, a general purposes room and a visiting services room. The nursery class is situated apart from the main building. The school grounds include two football pitches.

The current school roll is 220. There are eight classes in the school, organised as follows:

Nursery Class									
AM	PM	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	
22	16	30	25	20	27	26	29	25	

Twenty seven district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2004 and two district pupils enrolled elsewhere. There were also three non-district pupils enrolled in P1.

Absence rates for 2003–2004 was 16 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 18 and 18 respectively. There were no formal exclusions in 2003–2004.

The teaching staff in 2004–2005 was:

Basic Complement	PA/SfL*
9.91 FTE**	0.44 FTE
Visiting Specialist(s)	Absence Cover
0.23 FTE	0.25 FTE

*Positive action/support for learning

**Full time equivalent

The headteacher (HT) has no teaching commitment and is supported by one principal teacher (PT). There are visiting teachers for physical education (PE), music and French.

The pupil teacher ratio is 20:1. In addition, 11 support staff are allocated to a range of whole-school responsibilities.

All members of the teaching and support staff have entered the professional review and staff development and review scheme.

The pupil unit cost for 2003–2004 was £2653, compared to authority and national averages of £2709 and £2586 respectively. There is a School Board and a PTA.

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

National testing in reading, writing and mathematics is fully established at all stages. The school's current performance in relation to national 5–14 attainment targets is:

	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05*
Reading	80%	81%	90%	78%	85%	90%
Writing	75%	68%	87%	76%	81%	85%
Mathematics	79%	75%	87%	87%	71%	87%

* 2005 target

Seven pupils, none of whom have a Record of Needs, have been referred to psychological services.

THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The current school development plan covers the period 2003–2006 and targets the following main priorities:

- ✿ review the mathematics programme;
- ✿ raise attainment in mathematics;
- ✿ implement new language and mathematics policies;
- ✿ review assessment procedures;
- ✿ develop social studies;
- ✿ deliver personal and social education for transition;
- ✿ develop the modern languages programme;
- ✿ develop enterprise in education;

- ✿ improve pupil and staff self-evaluation; and
- ✿ develop an art and a drama programme.

The review programme based on the standards and quality (S&Q) report comprised two key areas:

- ✿ ethos
- ✿ management leadership and quality assurance.

plus the authority theme:

- ✿ continuity and progression in learning including transitions.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

St Mark's RC Primary School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Services and Education Support Services Groups of the Education Department during January 2005. The review was based on the school's own S&Q report for session 2003–2004. This was considered by the team to be of a very good quality and to form an acceptable basis for review.

The review team considered statements made by the school about two key areas in the S&Q report, along with the authority theme, and made their evaluation on the basis of evidence provided by the school and their own observations. Their findings are given below.

To make their evaluation, the team consulted school documents, including the school development plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 25 lessons were observed. These were evaluated as good to very good, with two in the fair category. A questionnaire was issued to a sample of parents.

Thirty-four questionnaires were sent to parents and 11 were returned. Forty-two questionnaires were sent to nursery parents and eight were returned. All parents were satisfied with their children's progress and the ethos and management of the school.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 ETHOS

The review team agreed with the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ✿ School partnership with parents, the School Board and the community is very good.
- ✿ There is regular use of praise to implement positive behaviour management.
- ✿ Pupils show a sense of responsibility to themselves, to each other and to the community.
- ✿ Pupils and staff identify strongly with the school and are proud to be associated with it.
- ✿ There are effective arrangements for consulting with pupils and involving them in decision making.

Overall ethos in the school was very good.

Strengths in ethos

Very good links existed between the school and the PTA. Communication was regular between the PTA, the school administration and other agencies. Fundraising schemes were very effective and parents had promoted pupils' interest by making selective purchases of books for the school library, assisted by pupil council representatives.

The School Board was a very active support to the school. Members stimulated debate and action on environmental issues with the City of Edinburgh Council on behalf of the school. They also arranged curriculum workshops and budget meetings for parents.

The business manager and the administrative staff identified very positively with the school and its leadership. They found the staff development and review process inclusive.

School links with the church, the army, the police, hospitals and the local library were

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frequent, productive and inclusive of the whole school community.

Praise was effective in promoting positive classroom behaviour, and in showcasing pupils' work and achievement throughout the school, in open areas, at the 'golden lunch table' and at school assemblies.

Pupils demonstrated polite, courteous and caring behaviour. There was a variety of incentives to encourage responsibility. Enterprising initiatives organised by pupils included: an art display; a P7 newspaper; P5 catering for a Christmas show.

The 'Grounds for Awareness' scheme had led to a very positive concern for the local school environment by pupils through the nurturing of newly planted trees.

There was a lively and responsible pupil council which consulted both with other pupils and with the HT. The council had an effective voice in discussing initiatives such as local speed bumps, fence location and selling the P7 newspaper. A Tsunami appeal was a recent example of social responsibility taken by the school council.

The institution of a 'friendship bench' designed by pupils, had had a positive effect on playground behaviour and on social inclusion. The playground was a focus of much pride and the school was working towards an award under the Eco schools scheme.

Vulnerable pupils were supported in the playground by experienced playground assistants and a playground squad. The playground squad worked very hard to ensure the younger children enjoyed the playground. Strategies to promote positive behaviour and avoid conflict were shared with all members of the school community.

All pupils showed a commitment to wearing school uniform.

Road safety officers, the road safety police contact, and playground assistants all felt valued and closely identified with the school. They all received regular reports formally and informally from teaching staff.

Through excellent team work by staff and pupils, a trip to Lourdes with children with additional support needs was a success.

The school had an excellent website.

Areas for development in ethos

A facility for parents of nursery children to wait between collection times should be developed.

Consideration should be given to making pupils aware of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, through more public displays of multicultural themes and in topic work.

2 MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review team agreed with the following statements based on the school's S&Q report:

- ✦ The HT provides very good leadership and direction for the school.
- ✦ Senior staff remits are implemented to promote effective monitoring and evaluation.
- ✦ Senior management team (SMT) promotes literacy well.
- ✦ Professional review and staff development and review are well established and continuing professional development (CPD) needs are well identified for staff.

Overall management, leadership and quality assurance was good.

Strengths in management, leadership and quality assurance

The HT had personal credibility and was very approachable. She had built up very good relationships with pupils, parents, staff and appropriate agencies.

All members of the school community felt close identity with the school as a result of the HT's clear focus on values and integrity. Two-way communication was greatly facilitated by a strong team spirit.

The HT conducted routine and effective scrutiny of teachers' forward plans. She identified action points and met with teachers to discuss the next steps for pupils' learning.

Records to support vulnerable pupils were shared with teaching and non-teaching staff involved with them, resulting in effective strategies to promote social and academic learning.

The HT's involvement with the PTA was proactive. Agendas and letters were efficiently processed and good suggestions were implemented.

The HT had involved the School Board fully in consultation on the school's S&Q report and development plan. The School Board considered itself a useful sounding board.

The special educational needs learning assistants were well managed and fulfilled their remits effectively. They received information from teachers on new pupils and were using individualised educational programmes (IEPs) to plan. The HT held regular support staff meetings to keep staff fully aware of policies and procedures and to address issues.

Senior staff with responsibility for literacy and numeracy were fulfilling their remits very well. The new writers' and mathematics programmes were inspirational, and documentation and support were reaching all teachers.

Assessment folders were passed on to receiving teachers and there was good tracking of pupils through national test procedures.

Staff were using and developing a variety of assessment strategies, formative, summative and pupil self assessment.

The PT managed the new City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) mathematics programme well, with care for balance, progression, pace and challenge. This eased pupils' move to secondary school.

The CEC 'A Case for Writing' had been revised by the PT to create the 'Star Writers' programme. This enabled more stimulating, streamlined and effective teaching. Visual displays of criteria reminded pupils of the writing goals.

Work was kept in folders for transfer to receiving teachers. Visual display of pupils' writing was a most attractive feature of the atrium.

Pupils' writing, including poetry from P2, showed development of vocabulary and structure skills. There was a planning and drafting process, and marking code. Self assessment and peer marking contributed to discussion of 'next steps'.

There were regular meetings for staff, nursery, infant and upper school. Strategies were in place to integrate the newly appointed SFL teacher into the school. This would allow her time for cooperative planning with class teachers, a review of IEPs, agreed timetabling and an opportunity to meet pupils and their parents.

The SMT implemented staff development and review for all staff effectively and all felt this was a good team-building. Professional development opportunities were considered relevant and led to improved learning and teaching.

Areas for development in management, leadership and quality assurance

Building on current practice, the school should improve monitoring and evaluation of planning, assessment and record keeping in the nursery.

SMT minutes reflected the importance of learning and teaching issues. However, self-evaluation among class teachers with reference to learning and teaching should be promoted more regularly at staff meetings.

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The school should identify time for support staff to practise new techniques.

3 CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION IN LEARNING INCLUDING TRANSITIONS

The review team agreed with the following statements based on the school's S&Q report:

- ✿ Nursery-P1 transfer is well-planned and organised to support transition.
- ✿ The majority of pupils make good progress from their prior levels of learning.
- ✿ There are effective arrangements to ensure continuity in learning for most pupils in most areas of the curriculum.
- ✿ There is effective grouping for pupils.
- ✿ There is very good cluster liaison among partner schools for transition to St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School with particular attention to mathematics, modern languages and writing.

Overall continuity and progression including transitions was very good.

Strengths in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

There were good procedures to help children to move from home to nursery. There was an informative parent nursery handbook and access to curricular policies. Parents were welcomed.

Nursery transition records were passed to appropriate primary teachers and discussion about pupil progress took place. Nursery children's visits to the primary school helped their confidence at transition, and weekly PE and music sessions with the specialist teachers helped them to settle.

For children with additional needs, staff liaised effectively with relevant pre-5 establishments and professionals. Transition to specialist placements was well supported through meetings and relevant documentation.

The structured programme with skills progression in environmental studies was well taught and assessed with self-assessment, and next steps.

The school was addressing a recent decline in mathematics results. The PT with responsibility for mathematics was coordinating the use of new planners, course materials and transfer documents. She was using dedicated time to liaise effectively with relevant staff. Recent tracking of pupil progress has demonstrated improvement.

The 'Star Writer' programme had encouraged marking codes, next steps, using planning sheets, self and peer assessment and good tracking of literacy. Work, identified at levels, was collected and passed to the next teacher.

There was effective, flexible grouping of pupils for reading, writing, mathematics, PE and music.

There was good use of grouping for the literacy hour involving teachers and learning assistants.

Transition arrangements for pupils transferring to St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School were very good in foreign language, writing and mathematics.

A steering group of the HTs assured good cluster liaison in English, mathematics, languages and special educational needs, for transition to secondary.

Modern languages was particularly well supported. There was a common syllabus in French, time for liaison with partner schools, and specialist teacher time in St Mark's RC Primary School resulting in good continuity of pupil learning into S1.

Effective transition to secondary was encouraged by: links between subject teachers and promoted personnel at secondary and class teachers and promoted personnel at primary; links between SfL, guidance and class teachers; meetings for parents and tours of St Thomas of

Aquin's RC High School; pupil familiarisation visits to St Thomas of Aquin's RC High School and pupil-friendly documentation.

Areas for development in continuity and progression including transitions

To aid transition and support partnership, nursery staff should introduce an 'all about me' sheet. Information from the nursery curriculum should inform whole school policies.

The nursery should be pro-active in gathering information from parents, and involving them in the curriculum and in children's learning, formally and informally.

Clear guidelines for monitoring and coordinating support for pre-school children with additional needs, with particular reference to IEPs, should be established.

The mathematics programme should be developed with the introduction of level B and C programmes of study. Record keeping of pupils' attainment in mathematics should be further developed to facilitate tracking of pupil progress.

Formative assessment should be further developed and learning criteria shared more with pupils.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ Very strong ethos of identity with the school felt by all members of the school community.
- ✿ The variety of incentives which encouraged the pupils to show responsibility, enterprise and citizenship.
- ✿ The good leadership and direction within the primary school provided by the HT and promoted staff.
- ✿ The level of support for vulnerable pupils.
- ✿ The literacy and mathematics programmes and the support offered through them to all staff.
- ✿ The very good transition arrangements for

transfer to secondary school, particularly in modern languages, English, mathematics and additional support needs.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ The school should develop pupil awareness of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.
- ✿ The school should improve monitoring and evaluation of planning, assessment and record-keeping in the nursery.
- ✿ The school should further promote self-evaluation within learning and teaching at staff meetings.
- ✿ The school should further develop the use of formative assessment to improve learning and teaching.

CONCLUSION

The school's self-evaluation, as represented in its S&Q report, was considered to be mostly well judged. Overall, the school's report is a very good reflection of the current development position.

Areas for development by the authority

- ✿ The school should be supported to produce an action plan to meet the recommendations in this report.
- ✿ Examples of good practice should be entered in the database of good practice to enable their wider dissemination.

Very good:	Major Strengths
Good:	Strengths outweigh weaknesses
Fair:	Some important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory:	Major weaknesses
Almost all:	90% plus
Most:	75% plus
Majority:	50% plus
Some:	15% plus
Few:	Less than 15%

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