

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

ST MARY'S RC (LEITH) PRIMARY SCHOOL

OCTOBER 2005

EDINBURGH
THE UNIVERSITY OF

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

St Mary's RC (Leith) Primary is a denominational primary school built in 1920 which serves the area of north east Edinburgh. The catchment area comprises a combination of private, housing association and council housing ensuring a good social mix amongst the pupils.

St Mary's RC (Leith) Primary School has 12 classrooms. The school building also includes a hall, a library, a flexibase (general purpose room), an information and communications technology (ICT) room, and a learning support base. The school grounds have three tarmaced play areas with a sheltered area, a garden, a quiet area and an outside class area. The nursery playground has fixed play equipment and a garden.

The current school roll is 319. There are 11 classes in the school.

Thirty district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2004 and seven district pupils enrolled elsewhere.

Absence rates for 2003-2004 was 19 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 18. There were no formal exclusions during the same period.

The headteacher (HT) has no teaching commitment and is supported by the depute headteacher (DHT). There is a principal teacher (PT) and two visiting teachers for physical education (PE) and music.

The pupil teacher ratio is 23:1. In addition, 17 support staff are allocated to a range of whole-school responsibilities.

The HT and all members of the teaching and support staff have entered the professional review and staff development and review schemes.

The pupil unit cost for 2003-2004 was £2819, compared to authority and national averages of £2858 and £2866 respectively. There is a School Board and parent teacher association (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	78%	79%	86%	81%	84%	88%
Writing	63%	72%	80%	77%	73%	82%
Mathematics	76%	80%	79%	72%	77%	81%

* 2005 Target

Thirteen pupils, one of whom has a Record of Needs, have been referred to psychological services.

THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The current school development plan covers the period 2004-2005 and targets the following main priorities:

- ✿ citizenship;
- ✿ health education;
- ✿ formative assessment;
- ✿ religious and moral education (RME);
- ✿ enterprise education;
- ✿ writing; and
- ✿ environmental studies 5-14.

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

- ✿ learning and teaching;
- ✿ ethos;

plus the authority theme:

- ✿ continuity and progression in learning including transitions.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

St Mary's RC (Leith) Primary School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Development and Neighbourhood Management Groups of the Children and Families Department during May 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. The results of their findings are given below as a commentary on the school's report.

In order to make their evaluation, the team consulted a number of school documents, including the school development plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 27 lessons were observed. A questionnaire was issued to a sample of parents.

One hundred and seventeen questionnaires were sent to parents and 47 were returned.

Parents' views

Almost all parents said that:

- ✿ they were satisfied with their children's progress, the ethos and learning and teaching at the school.

Most parents said that:

- ✿ the school was good at explaining their part in their children's education and the work of the school.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 LEARNING AND TEACHING

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

- ✿ Systematic evaluation and monitoring allows the management team to ensure that the education offered to all pupils is of very good quality.
- ✿ Staff provide stimulating learning environments and use a good variety of teaching approaches and appropriate differentiated activities to motivate pupils and build upon prior learning.
- ✿ Well-chosen resources are now better matched to the learning outcomes of 5-14.
- ✿ The balance of experience of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching, ensures very good learning experiences for all pupils.
- ✿ Assessments are used effectively to identify and plan next steps.
- ✿ Parents are actively involved in supporting their children's learning.

Overall, learning and teaching was very good

Strengths in learning and teaching

The senior management team (SMT) regularly monitored forward plans and teachers' evaluations of pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work. Verbal and written feedback was provided to staff. SMT opportunities and contexts for shared classroom experiences were agreed with the staff. Positive written evaluations were provided to inform next steps.

Staff used a very good range of teaching approaches and maximised opportunities to work directly with pupils in well-planned whole class, group and individual situations. Teachers clearly shared the learning intentions and success criteria in all classes and were skilful in their explanations, expositions and questioning.

Pupils had a very good understanding of what they needed to improve.

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Commendably, classroom teachers and learning assistants made effective cross curricular use of ICT which motivated the pupils. The pace of learning was well-matched to individual needs and pupils took responsibility for and were active in their own learning. Pupils had very good opportunities to work independently and to collaborate with others. The nursery environment was stimulating and provided a wide range of experiences and activities which supported learning across the five key areas of the curriculum.

A very good choice of resources was made in environmental studies, science, ICT, reading, RME, drama, art and modern languages which were well-matched to the learning outcomes.

The staff demonstrated very good teamwork and there was a strong culture of sharing expertise formally and informally which met the needs of the school and its pupils. The support for learning teacher took a leadership role in the management of integration and provided advice and training opportunities for teachers and support staff. Almost all pupils with special educational needs and individualised educational programmes (IEPs) were making very good progress towards their individual targets. The support for learning staff provided high quality support to ensure very good learning experiences for all pupils. This included the effective management of resources.

City of Edinburgh Council planning and assessment guidelines were being implemented in the nursery. Next steps were clearly recorded and assessment information was used to compile weekly plans. P1-P7 pupils' attainment was regularly and effectively assessed with a good range of record sheets in most areas. Teachers and learning assistants were knowledgeable about their pupils and sought to find out how individuals were dealing with learning intentions.

Parents were involved in supporting their children's learning in a variety of ways. They were positively encouraged to communicate with teachers through a range of informal and formal opportunities. This included reading records, homework diaries and target setting information.

Parents interviewed were very satisfied with the level of communication received from the school. They were aware of the curriculum being taught in their children's classes and knew their children's level of attainment. They were very supportive of the work of the school and felt that they were enabled to participate in their children's education.

Areas for development in learning and teaching

The school should continue to develop its learning and teaching policy and include an updated policy statement on homework.

The school should continue to develop the practice of formative assessment as planned.

The school should update its support for learning policy to include procedures for new legislation.

2 ETHOS

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

- ✦ The ethos of the school is very good.
- ✦ Our positive behaviour policy is central to school life and every opportunity is taken to encourage and motivate pupils.
- ✦ Parents support learning in the school in a variety of ways.
- ✦ The School Board and PTA are very supportive of the work of the school and there are excellent community links.

Overall, the ethos was very good.

Strengths in ethos

Pupils, parents and staff identified strongly with the school and were proud to be associated

with it. Parents and visitors were warmly welcomed and the SMT, teaching and support staff consistently played a very significant role in fostering a good atmosphere throughout the school. The learning assistants and school support officer were fully committed to the needs of the school and provided invaluable support. Pupil and staff morale was high and there were very good relationships between staff and pupils.

All staff had high expectations of pupils' attendance and behaviour and successfully promoted a strong ethos of achievement throughout the school. All staff had successfully established a learning environment which demonstrated clear expectations for the high quality of pupils' work.

The positive behaviour policy was consistently implemented throughout the school. Golden rules were clearly displayed throughout P1-P7 and complementary strategies were evident in the nursery. Almost all pupils worked conscientiously and cooperatively with staff and each other. The pupils were well-behaved, polite and courteous. The buddy system encouraged pupils to be kind and to demonstrate consideration for others.

Appropriate use of praise and the celebration of success was evident throughout the school. The weekly assemblies publicly acknowledged achievement, kindness and good behaviour. Peers, parents, family members and the wider community were welcomed to celebrations which shared achievement.

Pupils had very good opportunities to exercise responsibilities, including the pupil council, the ECO committee and the peace and justice group.

Parents were encouraged to support their children's learning and the life of the school. They were involved in homework, target setting

P1-P7, open evenings and three parental consultations per year. There were opportunities for parents to take part in outings and classroom activities. The school used a wide range of procedures for communicating with parents, including newsletters and a website. Parents readily engaged with the school and were strongly supportive of the effective two-way communication which exists. Most parents were clear about aspects of the work of the school.

The family learning worker effectively contributed to the ethos involving parents in the life of the school through a wide range of opportunities. However the school was aware that there was a need to extend opportunities to involve more parents.

The HT and staff had well-developed links with the School Board and PTA. Very good relationships were evident in these partnerships, which were strongly valued by all.

There were very good links with the community, including the local parish and Leith rotary club. Pupils had been involved by singing at residential and nursing homes, actively participating in the local allotment and fundraising for charitable causes. The school organised a range of events which the community could attend.

Areas for development in ethos

The positive behaviour strategies should continue to be reviewed to ensure their effectiveness, especially in the upper school.

The school should continue to provide opportunities to encourage more parents to become involved.

Newsletters to parents on the work of the school should be reviewed to provide more effective communication from the pupil council, School Board and PTA on a termly basis.

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3 CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION IN LEARNING INCLUDING TRANSITIONS

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

- ❁ Breadth, balance and progression in reading, environmental studies, science, ICT and RME are very good.
- ❁ The modern language programme developed within the cluster will ensure appropriate progression is made within this area.
- ❁ An audit of current practice in assessment and recording has updated records and evidence kept at all stages and for all curricular areas.
- ❁ Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress with targets set for them.
- ❁ A significant number of pupils achieve beyond their expected level in reading, writing and mathematics.
- ❁ Transition arrangements between the nursery and the school are very good.

Overall continuity and progression in learning including transitions was very good.

Strengths in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

Programmes of study in reading, modern languages, environmental studies, science, ICT and RME provided breadth and balance. The elements of the courses were being taught in an appropriate sequence. Resources had been purchased and were well-organised to support continuity and progression.

The audit of current practice in assessment and recording had improved systematic monitoring of progress and achievement. There was effective communication of information about pupils' achievements between senior managers, class teachers, support for learning staff and parents. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own progress and contribute to their own

learning plans were introduced in P3-P7, as well as target setting in P1-P7.

Pupils with special educational needs were very well-integrated into the life of the school. The support for learning teacher made a very good contribution to the curriculum, individualised programmes of work and strategies to meet pupils' needs. She had developed effective teamwork to ensure that learning needs were systematically identified and barriers to learning addressed.

Transition arrangements between the nursery and the school were very good. There was effective transfer of assessment information through the transfer document, which was shared with parents and P1 staff. There were appropriate opportunities for staff to exchange clear and detailed information about pupils' learning needs. Curricular workshops were held for parents and information about the transition process was good. The family learning worker was effective in supporting the transition process through a series of events and activities which involved other relevant agencies.

The Lowport outdoor excursion for parents and pre-5 children provided very good opportunities for personal, social and emotional development. All children and parents, including those from other pre-5 settings, were given the opportunity to visit the primary school and meet with P1 staff at an 'Open Day'. Other opportunities were used throughout the year for P1 staff to get to know the children and the nursery teacher was involved in P1 curriculum planning in the initial stages to ensure continuity and progression. Target sheets complemented children's assessment files to summarise progress across the five key aspects of learning in the nursery curriculum.

A significant number of children were achieving beyond their stage level. A range of monitoring strategies were in place which systematically tracked individual pupils' progress and improved continuity in learning. A comprehensive system

of regular assessment, recording and reporting between stages and to parents was evident. The development of assessment folders by staff and pupil folios improved pupils' progress. Effective use was made of the information gathered. Pupils had begun to set their own learning and personal targets. The school had identified the need to further develop specific resources and learning activities at all stages to improve continuity and progression in mathematics and attainment in writing.

A developing transition programme with the cluster secondary school, which was particularly evident in modern languages and the assessment is for learning programmes, worked towards good progression.

Areas for development in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

Update policy documents for pre-5 curriculum, writing and mathematics language, to take account of new practice and resources.

Further improve communication for pupils and parents on transition P7-S1, including preparation of an annual calendar of planned events for session 2005-2006 and information on any cluster transition projects.

Continue to develop opportunities with other schools at transition P7-S1.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ The very positive approach shown by pupils and staff to learning.
- ✿ The very good teamwork amongst teaching and support staff.
- ✿ The very good support given by the support for learning teacher.
- ✿ The very good support staff contribution to all aspects of school life.

- ✿ The very good climate and positive relationships which have been forged throughout the school with parents and the community.
- ✿ The very good continuity and progression in learning for almost all pupils from nursery to P7.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ The school should continue to develop and implement effective learning and teaching strategies with agreed cluster development and to develop specific resources and learning activities relevant to all stages and curricular areas.
- ✿ The school should continue to encourage parental involvement in the work of the school.
- ✿ The school should continue to develop opportunities to ensure progression for all pupils entering S1.

CONCLUSION

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

Areas for development by the authority

- ✿ The school should be supported to prepare an action plan to meet the main recommendations in this report.
- ✿ Areas of good practice identified in this report should be entered on the database of good practice.

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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