



**Perth and Kinross Council  
Education and Children's Services**



**Extended Learning and Achievement Visit Report  
St Dominic's RC Primary School  
28 and 29 May 2014**

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this visit was to support the school in the process of self-evaluation. Two Quality Improvement Officers from Education and Children's Services were involved over two days. The themes subject to scrutiny were based on core Quality Indicators from 'How good is our school?' and reflected the most recent advice note from Education Scotland which outlines raised expectations in relation to schools' implementation of all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

St Dominic's RC Primary School currently has 142 primary pupils in six classes, P1, P2, P3/4, P4/5, P5/6, P6/7 and a nursery class of 40 children over two sessions. The headteacher is supported by a principal teacher post which is filled on a job share basis by two staff. The school also offers a wraparound care service for children aged five and under which combines with an after school club for older children from both St Dominic's and Crieff Primary School.

During the visit, the team gathered information from observing learning and teaching during class visits; scrutiny of data; documentation and examples of children's learning; discussions with the Senior Management Team (SMT) and groups of staff, pupils and parents/carers.

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

Using information provided by the school in terms of individual teachers' assessments, most children are making appropriate progress from their prior level of attainment. The school knows its learners well. Using assessment data for Mathematics and English staff analyse the information, look to identify trends and plan for appropriate action to secure improvement. For example an identified dip in attainment in Mathematics has resulted in the development of a clear, progressive pathway for learners taking account of increased expectations to ensure steady progression across levels. The school has continued to develop these approaches to ensure progression in Language and Literacy and Social Subjects. There are plans for next session to similarly develop approaches to learning in Science and Technology.

Parents consulted spoke very positively of the broad range of experiences children in St Dominic's have access to during the school day, through

educational visits, at after school clubs and through special events. All children have the opportunity to engage in and achieve through a very broad range of experiences such as Scottish Gymnastics, Perth Festival of the Arts, Scottish Opera and the Living Communities Glass project. All children are members of committees which give them opportunities to take responsibility and develop organisational and interpersonal skills. These committees include ECO, Rights Respecting Schools, Ethos and Health where all children are involved in planning events throughout the year.

Strong community partnerships have been established, within and beyond the school, with a clear purpose and mutual benefit, as evidenced in the community engagement across the life of the school. The school hosts a number of social events each year that are organised by parents and children. These are very well supported as valued local community events and the impact for children in terms of personal achievement and community involvement is significant. For example during the visit, the local baker demonstrated his skills during a very well attended after-school event that saw an impressive range of home baking on display and also provided opportunities for children and staff to demonstrate their culinary skills.

Parents consulted identified strong and effective partnership working as a feature at St Dominic's. All spoke about the extent of community involvement and placed high value on the richness of experiences for children when parents and visitors worked with the school to enhance learning. For example during the visit a member of the community visited the school to talk to the children about how to support those with hearing impairments. On another occasion St Dominic's children visited the local care home when children and residents benefited from sharing golfing skills. Parents regularly support the children to take part in Forest School and many share their skills on a regular basis to enhance learning.

The entire school community is to be commended for its fundraising to support charities both local and global. Children's achievements are recognised in the weekly newsletter.

As a denominational school St Dominic's received very positive feedback from Education Scotland during a curriculum impact visit to review the impact of *This is our Faith* with some effective practice being used as an example of good practice in the national report.

#### Areas for development

- For session 2014-15 the school should further develop methods to consistently track significant learning to provide more robust evidence of each child's progress in their learning journey.

## LEARNING

Staff plan for children to develop core skills in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing within levels that are appropriate to their age and stage of development. Learning experiences are planned to support children make connections in and between learning in various curriculum areas.

During the visit, in most classes across the school, children were observed to engage enthusiastically in carefully planned lessons which clearly identified the intended learning. Most teachers use questioning well to check for understanding, provide clear explanations and deliver learning experiences that are well planned and capture children's interests whilst enhancing their knowledge and skills. Children confidently take part in learning sessions displaying their understanding and using their general knowledge and recall of previous learning to add richness to lessons. Whilst there were well-presented examples of children's work in each classroom, most would benefit from a review of the organisation and presentation in terms of layout and resources with a view to providing more opportunities for children to engage independently in more creative, stimulating learning environments.

In the nursery class children focus very well on the wide range of activities that are planned to enrich learning across the curriculum. Almost all children confidently engage with adults and their friends and are very happy to share their learning. They talked about why they were painting flags for the Royal visit and listened very well to the visitor who was talking about how to support the hearing impaired.

There is evidence that planned contexts for learning are memorable, stimulating, and enjoyable. For example, children in P3/4 were very enthusiastic to be learning about life in Edinburgh in the 1830s which included the story of Greyfriars Bobby. A day in Edinburgh was planned, with parents and children looking forward to a variety of interesting experiences. In other classes there was a focus on the Commonwealth Games and their importance to Scotland. Whilst there are progressive pathways for learning in some subjects, themes are identified to take account of children's needs and interests.

Support staff across the school work very effectively to support learning and ensure that every child is included. Those consulted evidence a strong teamwork ethic which sees them involved flexibly and effectively with children in a range of experiences. The school carefully plans to meet the needs of those learners who require additional support and there are effective processes in place to review additional support needs and to prepare children to move from one teacher to another each year.

Children who require additional support to help them achieve receive specialised programmes such as *Wave 3* to support them in learning to read. As a result of self-evaluation the school identified that the phonological

awareness of some children could be improved and took steps to improve methodology and resources.

There are effective arrangements for welcoming children into the school through regular visits to the nursery and on to P1. Staff from all external nurseries are welcome to visit to support their children have a happy start at St Dominic's. P7s moving on to Crieff High School and St John's Academy have opportunities to join their fellow cohorts at transition days which are arranged through the receiving schools.

#### Areas for development

- Throughout session 2014-15, staff should continue as planned to develop approaches to ensure progression pathways in learning through and across the curriculum whilst ensuring a focus on the needs and interests of learners.
- From August 2014, Perth and Kinross indicators should be used consistently across the school to inform the teacher's view of the child as a learner and to also inform future planned learning for all children including those who are more able.
- From August 2014 staff should further develop opportunities for children to learn more independently within rich, motivating and stimulating learning environments.

### **LEADERSHIP**

The school's statement of vision, values and aims sets out the aspirations of the school's pupils and staff and the Parent Council in terms of what they want St Dominic's Primary School to be; an environment for learning, that is inclusive and harmonious where Christian values flourish. Parents and staff consulted believe the school achieves its aim of everyone feeling valued knowing the school will work in partnership to ensure all learners grow and develop educationally, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

The effective leadership of the headteacher reflects the principles and values which are established in St Dominic's; that of a welcoming, inclusive environment that welcomes parents and visitors to the school and instils an empathy in children through a myriad of fund raising activities such as providing a kitchen for the Mary's Meals project in Malawi. Parents consulted spoke extremely positively about the welcoming, nurturing ethos in the school and feel confident the headteacher and staff are aware of any concerns and respond positively to solve any problems as they occur.

Several staff have taken on leadership roles within the committees system and at after school clubs. The headteacher encourages teaching staff to lead an aspect of curriculum development. Commendably, all support staff take responsibility for leading some of the wide range of activities on offer to enhance children's experiences and to support the smooth running of the school.

Children's leadership skills are developed through the committee system, sporting activities and the significant fundraising opportunities. They lead their own learning when planning with teachers as they take their interests forward.

Parents and children support the school in the process of self-evaluation. This includes questionnaires to gather views on a range of areas. These are analysed by staff with the involvement of either parents or children to identify points for action, evidencing that opinions and comments are valued by the school.

Monitoring of teaching and learning by the leadership team supports some improvement, however this now needs to be more rigorous and systematic ensuring clear goals are set and progress towards meeting them evaluated more carefully to ensure continuous, necessary improvement.

#### Area for development

- From September 2014 the Senior Management Team should plan and engage in a more focused, rigorous monitoring programme across the school to ensure continuous improvement based on identified areas for development.

#### Summary

In planning to take the school forward on its journey of improvement the staff should take cognisance of the comments within the report as follows:

- For session 2014-15, in working towards raising achievement and attainment, the school needs to continue to consistently track each child's learning journey to illustrate progress in learning based on robust evidence. This will help in planning appropriate support and challenge to ensure all children reach their potential.
- For session 2014-15, to ensure consistency and recognition of progress as children move through the school. Perth and Kinross Indicators should now be used consistently across the school to support teachers' professional judgment and to inform planned learning.
- For session 2014-15, continue as planned to develop approaches to ensure progression in learning through and across the curriculum whilst ensuring a focus on the needs and interests of learners.
- From August 2014 staff should further develop opportunities for children to learn more independently within rich, motivating, stimulating learning environments.
- From September 2014 the Senior Management Team should plan and engage in regular, focused, rigorous monitoring across the school to ensure continuous improvement based on identified areas for development.

## **Conclusion**

St Dominic's RC Primary is a happy, nurturing school with a strong staff team who have a clear focus on the care, welfare and spiritual development of children. The partnerships established between the school, parents, the Catholic Church and the wider community impact positively on the quality of learning experiences across the school. All children are very well behaved and are a credit to their school and their families. This was particularly evident during the visit to McCrosty Park to greet The Earl and Countess of Strathearn when the behaviour of St Dominic's pupils was exemplary to the extent they were complimented by members of the public. The ethos of care and respect amongst the entire school community is tangible and this together with the positive, inclusive environment for learning makes St Dominic's a safe, happy school in which all children thrive.

The school is well placed to take forward the areas for development identified in this report, which will further strengthen the learning and development of all children.

### [HMI Report](#)

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