

**St Brendan's Primary School
Motherwell
North Lanarkshire Council
20 February 2007**

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1. Background

St Brendan's Primary School was inspected in October 2006 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met a member of the School Board, representatives of the Parents' Association and a group of parents¹.

St Brendan's Primary School is a denominational school serving parts of the Muirhouse and Craigneuk areas of Motherwell, and the Netherton area of Wishaw. At the time of the inspection the roll was 161. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been in post for ten months.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The development of pupils as caring, responsible citizens with a commitment to looking after each other, their environment and the global community.
- The positive ethos, marked by strong relationships and teamwork of the staff.
- The quality of pastoral care.
- The strong, productive partnerships with the church and the community.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents were pleased with almost all aspects of the school. Almost all felt that staff made them feel welcome and that the school had a good reputation in the community. A few would have liked to be consulted more on the work of the school and would have liked more advice on how to help their children with homework. Around a

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

quarter did not think that the school informed them sufficiently about the priorities for improving the education of their children. Pupils were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. Almost all felt that teachers expected them to work hard and that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. A few did not think that their teachers listened to what they had to say or that they were treated fairly. Teachers and support staff were pleased about almost all aspects of the school. They felt they worked well as a team. Around a half of support staff did not think that they had good opportunities to be involved in the decision-making processes in the school. A fifth of support staff did not think there was effective communication or that there was regular discussion about school priorities.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was good, with suitable breadth at all stages. Initiatives in a number of areas including science, technology and information and communications technology (ICT) were helping to improve pupils' development of knowledge and skills. Commendably, all pupils received two hours of high quality physical education each week. Visiting specialists in music and French made valuable contributions. The development of pupils' personal and social skills was embedded in the school's approach to learning about, and caring for, the environment. Pupils learned about issues in the global community through the Eco Schools project and Fairtrade activities. The headteacher was aware of the need to further develop ICT across the curriculum and to continue to review programmes. The quality of teaching was good. Teachers planned their lessons well and gave clear explanations, directions and instructions. Almost all teachers shared lesson content with pupils and a few had begun to discuss learning targets with them. All teachers interacted positively with pupils and used praise effectively to motivate and encourage. Teachers used questioning well to check pupils' understanding. Use of ICT in teaching and learning was too limited. Homework was regularly set and well used to support pupils' learning.

Almost all pupils were very well behaved and keen to learn. At all stages, they cooperated and collaborated well in a range of activities. In P3, pupils worked in groups of three when confidently presenting reports on environmental studies to the whole class. Pupils in P6 enthusiastically discussed health issues as pairs. Pupils in P5 also worked well in pairs to produce a collage in art and design. Pupils were beginning to develop skills in evaluating their own learning, for example, in P2 during reading and in P4 in physical education. However, pupils had too few opportunities to work independently and their motivation decreased when teachers provided them with too much information. In a few cases, pupils were not sufficiently challenged by the pace of work.

The school took very effective steps to help pupils achieve across a wide range of activities. Pupils at all stages demonstrated self-confidence and positive attitudes towards others and the world around them. Pupils were actively involved in the life of the school through the pupil council, Eco committee and the Fairtrade group. They had improved areas of the school including the recently-opened Peace Garden. The school

had achieved two Eco School green flags and was one of the first schools in Scotland to gain Fairtrade status. Pupils spoke with pride about their responsibility and actions for conserving and improving the local and global environments. Pupils were developing their sports skills in after-school clubs including football, netball, athletics and multi-sports. They had achieved success in poetry and art competitions and performed in regular musical productions including the Christmas show and the St Andrew's Day show. Pupils in P5 had recorded their own CD in a professional studio. Pupils at all stages regularly raised money for a range of charities.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Most pupils at all relevant stages were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. In recent years attainment in reading had remained steady. During the last session, pupils' attainment in writing had shown significant improvement. Staff did not formally assess pupils' attainment in listening and talking. Pupils who were experiencing difficulty in classwork were making good progress. Bilingual pupils were making good progress. Throughout the school, pupils listened well to adults and each other and most expressed their views clearly and confidently. At P1 to P3, pupils were making a strong start to reading and writing. Pupils at all stages were systematically developing skills in reading for information, and demonstrated a good level of knowledge about language. However, a few pupils at P6/P7 did not read widely for pleasure and were not able to talk about favourite authors. At all stages, pupils wrote well for a range of purposes and audiences. They had a good understanding of what they needed to do to develop their writing skills further. Most pupils presented their written work neatly.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. In recent years, levels of attainment had remained steady. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. At P2, almost all pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, a few at P4 to P7 were capable of achieving better standards by being set more challenging tasks. Almost all pupils were making good progress in their coursework. Pupils who experienced difficulties in mathematics were making good progress. By P7, pupils were not able to identify and select information from a range of graphs. They did not have experience of using computers to organise and present information. At all stages, pupils were competent using and understanding number, and were secure in their knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shape. At all stages, pupils were able to use appropriate strategies to help solve mathematical problems. Pupils had the opportunity to apply their mathematical skills in practical contexts including, for example surveys of water use.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were adequate. Teachers took account of prior learning when planning work for most pupils. However, tasks and activities did not always meet the needs of higher achieving pupils well enough. Shortages in the availability of appropriate learning support staff affected the school's capacity to meet pupils' learning needs. A supply teacher provided helpful support to a range of pupils. Individual pupils also received good support from class teachers, classroom assistants, support assistants and visiting specialists such as the teacher of English as an additional language. However, the school did not have a systematic approach for identifying and meeting the needs of pupils who required additional support with their learning. A few pupils with additional support needs had individualised educational programmes (IEPs). These IEPs required further development to ensure learning targets were more appropriate and that parents were fully involved at an earlier stage. There were good arrangements for supporting pupils at times of transition, for example, from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The quality of pastoral care throughout the school was very good. All staff knew pupils very well and were sensitive to their physical, social and emotional needs. The school had effective procedures to deal with child protection issues. There were also clear arrangements in place for identifying and responding to any concerns about bullying. Pupils felt safe and very well looked after. There were very good arrangements for developing pupils' understanding of health issues, including personal safety and substance misuse. The school placed high priority on health promotion, for which it had won a bronze award. Pupils were encouraged and given opportunities to put into practice their learning about the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise.

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation and facilities was adequate. Staff made very good use of the range of teaching areas including the expressive arts room, the library and the computer suite. The quality of display in classrooms and throughout the school was outstanding. There were extensive grounds for recreation and play. The internal building was cleaned to very high standards. Security arrangements for the building were appropriate. However, the building was not accessible for those with restricted mobility. Parts of the building were very cold. Some aspects of the internal decor were in need of attention. Windows were draughty and blinds were in need of repair. There was evidence of leaks affecting corridors and some classrooms.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a warm and friendly atmosphere where pupils, visitors and parents felt welcome. Staff, pupils and parents were very proud of the school. Staff and pupil morale was very high and the interaction between them was exceptionally good. Pupils at all stages were polite, courteous and very well behaved. All staff contributed fully to the positive ethos in the school. There was a strong sense of team work. At all stages teachers set high expectations for pupils' achievements, attendance and behaviour. Weekly school assemblies and attendance at mass provided regular opportunities for worship and for celebrating pupils' successes. Pupils' achievements were recognised through the effective use of photographs and display throughout the school. Awards included attendance certificates, pupil of the week, star writer and healthy choice rewards. The school actively and effectively promoted a strong sense of equality and fairness, to which pupils responded positively.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school was well supported by the School Board and Parents' Association. Parents were highly supportive of the school through, for example, assisting with events, and fundraising for charities. Progress reports and parents' evenings were informative and helpful. There was effective communication about school activities through regular newsletters, the school handbook and parents' workshops. There were very good links with the parish, with very effective pastoral support from the parish priest who played an active role in supporting all aspects of life of the school. The local councillor and local Member of Parliament supported a number of class activities. The school was well served by the community police and transport police for health and safety education. Through environmental, Fairtrade and enterprise activities, the school had developed helpful contacts with a wide range of local businesses. The school had a business partnership agreement with the British Heart Foundation.

7. Leading and improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

St Brendan's Primary School provided a very caring and supportive environment for learning. There were very good relationships and teamwork of staff. The quality of learning and teaching was good. There was a strong emphasis on the development of pupils as responsible citizens through the school's approach to caring for the environment and the global community. Standards of attainment in English language and mathematics were good. A few pupils could achieve more through better identification of learning needs to ensure sufficient support and challenge in their learning.

The new headteacher had high expectations of the school and had communicated this to staff, pupils and parents. She had identified a number of priority areas for development and had already made a number of improvements, including communication and in the promotion of a greater sense of school identity through pupils' uniform. Parents and staff had commented on the positive impact she had achieved in the school. She had been successful in developing productive partnerships that had impacted positively on pupils' experiences. She promoted the school well and ensured that its achievements were celebrated in the wider community. She had made a number of important changes in her short time in the school, and now needed to develop collaborative working approaches with the staff. She had made a good start to establishing a monitoring programme which, with the school's tracking and target setting approaches, had already increased attainment in writing. She had produced an evaluative standards and quality report. However, staff, parents and pupils were not sufficiently involved in evaluating the performance of the school. Self-evaluation was not yet sufficiently focussed on

teaching and learning. Teachers needed to continue to develop their approaches to critical self-evaluation of their own practices.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve aspects of provision. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- develop a systematic approach to the identification of pupils' learning needs, to ensure sufficient support and challenge for all pupils;
- further develop approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, to ensure a clearer focus on teaching and learning; and
- continue to develop ICT to enhance learning and teaching.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Mary Hoey
HM Inspector

20 February 2007

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	adequate

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	good
Self-evaluation	adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed being at school and found work stimulating and challenging. • The school had a good reputation in the community. • Staff made them feel welcome and they found reports about their children's progress helpful. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and made clear to parents the standards of work expected from pupils. • The school encouraged children to work to the best of their ability and was good at letting parents know their children's strengths and weaknesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They felt they needed a clearer view about the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils. • The school needed to consult them more on decisions which affected their child. • They needed more information about how to support their children with their homework.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being at school, felt safe and well looked-after and that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • The behaviour of pupils was good and staff were good at dealing with bullies. • Teachers knew them well and expected them to work hard. • They thought they got about the right amount of homework, which teachers checked. • Teachers were good at letting them know how to improve their learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few thought that teachers did not listen to what they had to say. • A few thought that pupils were not treated fairly.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and support staff had very positive views about almost all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around a half of support staff did not think that they had good opportunities to be involved in the decision-making processes in the school. • A fifth of support staff did not think there was effective communication or that there was regular discussion about school priorities.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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