



**St Thomas' RC Primary
School and Nursery Class
Arbroath
Angus Council
16 June 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents² and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term ‘school’ is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Examples of good practice
4. How well do children learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?
6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

1. The school

St Thomas' RC Primary School is a denominational school with a nursery class. It serves the town of Arbroath and outlying rural areas. The roll was 138, including 17 in the nursery when the inspection was carried out in April 2009. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The welcoming ethos and high standard of care provided by all staff for children.
- Children's achievement in mathematics.
- The headteacher's contribution to improving children's learning.
- Well-behaved children and their positive relationships with staff.
- Effective partnerships with parents and the local community to support children's learning.

3. Examples of good practice

- Promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Developing literacy through *Moving Images Education*.
- Planning for learning using mind-maps.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Children in the nursery class enjoy learning. They are very interested in the wide range of learning experiences which staff provide. Children achieve very well across all areas of their learning. Almost all are becoming independent learners and like to try things for themselves.

They listen well and talk confidently about their own ideas and enjoy listening to stories or looking at books. Most children recognise their name in print. They are starting to develop skills in early writing and counting. Children use numbers appropriately in play and enjoy solving problems with support. They can successfully sort, match and make comparisons of interesting natural materials.

Across the primary stages, children are becoming skilful in planning their learning using mind-maps. They have good opportunities to make suggestions about what they would like to learn. Many are successfully developing personal and social skills and their abilities in sports, music and arts. Those in P7 have developed their confidence and learned new skills during a recent residential experience. At all stages, children have a good understanding about healthy foods and activities. Children in P1/2 are successfully learning about planting and growing seeds. Across the primary stages, children are making very good progress in mathematics and listening and talking within English language. They are making good progress in reading and writing. Most children attain appropriate national levels in reading and writing and almost all do so in mathematics. In writing, attainment has improved over recent years. Children's attainment in mathematics has been consistently very strong. In English language, children listen attentively and talk confidently to adults. Most read well with good expression and can give their opinions confidently. They are able to write clearly for a variety of purposes. Children do not always write at sufficient length. In mathematics, children work well with numbers and have a sound knowledge of shapes. Across the stages, staff make effective use of games to motivate children in their mathematics. By P7, children can use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively to sort and present information on graphs. They are confident in problem-solving.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff in the nursery class take good account of children's interests and views when planning appropriate learning experiences. They organise a wide range of stimulating indoor and outdoor activities for children,

including many opportunities for imaginative play. Staff provide regular access to interesting outdoor play areas which helps to develop children's confidence in balancing, climbing, running and jumping. Children learn successfully about the natural world and about caring for growing plants. In the primary classes, the curriculum is broad and balanced. Staff are beginning to take account of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Teachers plan activities well so that children can apply their learning in different areas of the curriculum. For example, children develop their literacy and numeracy skills in many areas of the curriculum. Across the stages, children have enjoyed learning about various aspects of Scotland as part of a "homecoming" project. Visiting specialists help children to develop skills in art, music and physical education. All children learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles through regular physical education lessons and after-school activities. The school's work with *Moving Images Education* successfully encourages children to use language creatively. Across the stages, children are given opportunities to develop enterprise skills and to learn about environmental issues. Staff should plan more regular chances for children to develop these areas across the curriculum.

Staff in the nursery are very caring and sensitive to the learning needs of individual children and of their family circumstances. They now need to involve children more in setting and reviewing their individual learning targets. In the primary classes, staff work well together to plan tasks, activities and homework which meet the needs of most children. In a few lessons, work is too easy for higher achieving children. Teachers give clear explanations and use questioning well to check and develop children's understanding. However, children are not always clear about what they have to do to improve. Learning support staff work well with individuals and with small groups of children. They do not have sufficient opportunities to support teachers in classes. Children with English as an additional language receive appropriate support and make good progress in their learning. Targets for those children with individualised educational programmes (IEPs) need to be set and reviewed more effectively.

5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

Staff have productive links with a wide range of agencies and individuals outside the school. For example, the active schools coordinator successfully encourages children to participate in a wide range of sports, including golf. Parents provide very good support for the school and for children's learning. Many have helped to improve the school buildings and grounds. A few parents contribute very well to the after-school activities and clubs. Parents receive helpful information about their child's progress and about the curriculum, including sensitive health issues. Recent open-afternoons were highly successful and gave parents very good opportunities to see their children's learning experiences and work. Staff prepare children well for making a confident move from nursery into P1 and from P7 into secondary school. The school responds to any complaints quickly and effectively.

6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

Children are very good at taking on responsibilities across the school. At all stages, including the nursery classes, children participate well in the pupil council and regularly plan how to make the school better. They have worked well with the 'eco' group and staff to improve the playground by creating attractive garden and quiet areas. In classes, children have regular opportunities to reflect on their learning. Staff respond well to children's views. Children feel that they have a say in making the school better. Staff work well together to improve the school. They have appropriate opportunities for professional development and share good practice effectively with each other. Senior staff regularly visit classes and provide staff with helpful suggestions for improvement. The school's strong self-evaluation procedures have resulted in improvements in the attainment of most children. Staff are aware of the need to monitor all children's progress more thoroughly to build more effectively on their prior learning.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

Children are very proud of their school. Together with all staff, they are very welcoming to visitors. Staff have high expectations and have very good relationships with children and their families. Children's wider achievements are celebrated well at assemblies and in wall displays and newsletters. Children in the nursery and primary classes behave well and treat one another with respect. They work well together and share resources fairly. Almost all are well motivated to learn. Children feel safe and very well looked after. They have confidence that staff will deal effectively with any incidents of bullying. All staff know the children well and provide strong pastoral support and care. They encourage children to keep healthy and sample different healthy foods in the tuckshop. All staff are aware of the school's child protection procedures. They promote children's spiritual development and work well with the school chaplains to provide regular opportunities for religious observance. Children have good opportunities to develop their understanding of other cultures.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The school successfully shares its aims and values with staff, parents and children. The headteacher, well supported by staff and by her depute headteacher, has led many important developments to improve children's learning and achievements. Under her leadership, staff feel well led and well supported. They have good opportunities to take responsibility. Many contribute well to wider school life and initiatives to improve the school. The school provides very strong support for children and their families. It is well placed to continue to improve through building on existing good practice.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits following this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Strengthen arrangements for monitoring the progress of children with additional support needs, including those with individualised educational programmes.
- Use procedures for monitoring children's attainment to build more effectively on their prior learning.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no requirements

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for St Thomas' RC Primary School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	good

Nursery class

Improvements in performance	very good
Children's experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school and nursery class.

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good

HM Inspector: Alistair Brown
16 June 2009

To find out more about inspections or get an electronic copy of this report go to www.hmie.gov.uk. Please contact the Business Management and Communications Team (BMCT) if you wish to enquire about our arrangements for translated or other appropriate versions.

If you wish to comment about any of our inspections, contact us at HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk or alternatively you should write in the first instance to BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Our complaints procedure is available from our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can write to our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

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 (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to SPSO, 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 at www.spsso.org.uk.

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
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses