North Lanarkshire Council
Learning and Leisure Services
St. Patrick’s Primary School and Nursery Class, Coatbridge

Letter to Parents Following HMIE Inspection

February 2013

1 The Inspection

In March 2011 Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) published a report on your child’s school. The report acknowledged a number of particular strengths including polite and friendly children who are willing to learn; children’s learning experiences in the nursery; the approaches to developing children’s skills in reading; and the success of all staff and partners in supporting and extending children’s learning. HMI also agreed three areas for improvement with the school and the education authority.

Officers from the authority visited the school in February 2013 to look at how the school had continued to improve its work. During our visit we worked closely with staff and talked to children and parents. We looked at the specific areas for improvement that had been identified in the original report. As a result we were able to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found.

2 How well do children learn and achieve?

Almost all children in the nursery and across the school continue to be enthusiastic in their learning. The nursery provides children with a purposeful learning environment, including an outdoor play area with appropriate equipment and resources. Children across the school continue to be eager to learn and are very polite, with some children able to express themselves with a mature use of vocabulary. Children feel valued and recognise that staff listen to them and support them in their achievements. They continue to be confident and motivated and display many of the skills and attributes which underpin the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. In almost all primary classes, active approaches to learning are now embedded, including interdisciplinary learning. In many classes pupils are developing deep learning skills, including understanding and comprehension in the use of language, for example in storytelling, and peer assessment.

In the nursery, staff use skilled questioning to support the development of children’s understanding of the world around them and their use of vocabulary in a variety of contexts. There are many opportunities for children to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the playroom. Nursery staff should continue to further develop opportunities for children to explore literacy and numeracy to ensure they experience appropriate levels of challenge in their development and learning.

Across all stages in reading, writing and mathematics, most children are achieving the outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence at the appropriate levels to meet their individual learning needs.
Assessments confirm that pupils’ attainment overall is better than the expected level for their age and stage.

Across the school, the pace and challenge in children’s learning has increased, and pupils are now more actively engaged in their learning and progress. Most pupils at all stages continue to read with confidence and show a rich understanding of the text. In writing, pupils are developing a range of skills in different genres and formats including prose, reports and imaginative and extended writing. Children are developing their writing skills across the curriculum through the consistent and frequent use of their Writing Across the Curriculum workbooks. In mathematics, pupils across all stages display very good problem solving skills, mental arithmetic, and are adept at identifying the specific strategies they need to progress their learning. The school has introduced highly successful programmes, Catch Up Numeracy and Manga High to support differentiated learning for less able and high achieving pupils. Commendably, senior pupils won the St. Andrew’s High School cluster Maths Enterprise Competition in 2012 and 2013.

Across the primary stages children are encouraged to participate in wider achievement through a range of after school activities. These include extended learning, enterprise, expressive and performing arts, sports and ICT. Following a consultation with parents and pupils, the school is now increasing the range of opportunities to pupils at the early primary stages in music and sport activities.

The school has a system of peer mentoring and assessment which is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils’ learning, and increase their awareness of the importance of developing skills for learning. Pupils enjoy their additional responsibilities and speak proudly of their roles as Glow busters, media masters and pupil council members. Pupils value and respect each other’s comments on their learning. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills both at whole school and classroom level, for example, annual school shows including all aspects of production, design and performance, and presenting what they have learned in lessons to peers and parents.

3 How well does the school/centre support children to develop and learn?

All teachers now share learning intentions with their pupils and plenary sessions consolidate learning more effectively. In some classes pupils are now recording their peer assessment comments in their jotters. Some teachers are now providing high quality evaluative feedback to children in their jotters and workbooks. This good practice needs to be shared and adopted more widely across the school. All staff employ a wide range of Assessment is for Learning (AiFL) techniques to support children’s learning in all areas of the curriculum. This is now developing children’s capacity to solve problems, and encourages them to be more independent. To further extend this, teachers now need to encourage children to set their learning targets more frequently at every stage. Overall the pace of learning has improved and there has been an increase in teachers providing pupils with more meaningful activities which engage them more fully in their learning. Teachers are organising learning tasks and activities according to pupils’ needs, and pupils are now clearer about what they are learning.

The school uses technology effectively to support learning in a variety of contexts including learning support, literacy, mathematics and music. Interactive white boards are used extensively to support learning across all stages, and commendably children from P4-P7 are now using ePortfolio blogs for profiling their progress. This profiling system records pupils’ best and latest achievements across the eight curricular areas including literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Homework is now more systematic, regular, creative and challenging for pupils. Homework tasks extend the learning in the classroom, support the development of skills, particularly in numeracy, and are appropriately challenging and varied. The school now needs to build on this
further and develop a more consistent approach to homework including monitoring and tracking its effectiveness. The school is making more effective use of the after school homework club, and commendably is extending access to younger pupils.

Nursery staff use floorbooks to plan and record learning and provide an opportunity for consultation with children. Children’s profiles take account of information in the floorbooks. Staff now need to develop profiling to be more evaluative, with a clearer focus on children’s progress in learning. The school continues to support children and their parents well in moving from nursery to P1 and to S1 at St. Andrew’s High School. Staff at the nursery and P1 stages should continue to work together to ensure continuity, coherence and progression in learning.

Parents are very positive about their children’s experiences. They are aware of what is happening and are kept informed about their children’s progress. The Parent Council and PTA are very supportive of the headteacher and provide significant resources to enhance the learning and teaching. Parents say that the school communicates with them effectively, and provides opportunities for them to be involved in the life of the school through formal consultations and a variety of activities and events.

4 How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The school included areas for improvement within the school improvement plan, and reported to parents on the impact of progress in the school improvement reports of June 2011 and June 2012. The headteacher has worked hard with her Senior Management Team (SMT) to develop a culture of innovation and creativity amongst staff at all levels in the school. Teachers and support staff speak enthusiastically about their opportunities to lead and develop curricular initiatives and they work effectively in pairs, teams and as a whole group. The school has developed the Teacher Learning Community (TLC) model to provide a blueprint for sharing best practice, and creative approaches to learning and teaching. This collegiate approach to self-evaluation is serving the school well in building its capacity for improvement. This model now needs to extend to all aspects of approaches to learning and teaching including the further development of distributed leadership within every classroom and playroom setting. In the majority of classes, pupils experience innovative teaching approaches, which involve good use of distributed leadership to include pupils as leaders of learning. This good practice needs to be extended across the school and nursery through focused use of the self-evaluation rounds and classroom observation. In the nursery, staff are now using self-evaluation to improve outcomes for children. The headteacher now needs to involve nursery staff more in the school improvement planning process to enable them to take ownership of the learning outcomes for the nursery.

5 What happens next?

Since the original inspection, the headteacher, senior management team and staff have worked hard to further improve the school. The school has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve. It has made good progress towards the main areas for improvement. The authority is confident the school will continue with its plans to improve further, and as a result we will take no further action in connection with the report of March 2011.

Christine Pollock
Executive Director
Learning and Leisure Services