

Inspection of St Columba's School
by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, June 2011

Evaluation of Quality Indicators

Senior School, Transitus and Junior School

Improvements in learning	Excellent	6	Outstanding or sector leading
Learners' experiences	Excellent	6	Outstanding or sector leading
Curriculum	Very Good	5	Major strength
Meeting learning needs	Very Good	5	Major strength
Improvement through self-evaluation	Very Good	5	Major strength

In respect of Nursery and Prep, all five indicators were Very Good.

30 August 2011

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Columba's School and Nursery and Prep Classes
Kilmacolm**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited and inspected your child's school. Throughout our visit we talked to many parents and children and young people and we worked closely with the rector and staff. We wanted to find out how well children and young people were learning and achieving and how well the school supported children and young people to do their best. The rector shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work including active learning, wider achievement and the challenge and differentiation for children and young people. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school was at improving children's education. I would now like to tell you what we found.

Throughout the inspection we talked to a large number of young people and worked closely with the rector and staff.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Across the school, children and young people learn and achieve very well. Children in nursery and prep classes are happy, highly motivated and independent. They cooperate very well with each other, making choices confidently about what they want to do. From Junior 4 upwards, children benefit from a very wide range of extra-curricular activities which enrich their achievements. Children and young people's skills relating to responsibility and leadership, including for learning, life and work, are supported very well through daily school life. Across the whole school, many exercise responsibility through school committees. Seniors, particularly in S6, take on significant responsibility within the school prefect system. They are very well prepared for this through an impressive training programme. Almost all young people take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme which, in addition to developing individual qualities of perseverance and determination, makes a very positive contribution through volunteer work to the local community. The school competes successfully in sports at local and national level and other areas such as debating. Musical performances develop children and young people's personal skills and confidence to perform in activities such as the Junior 4 play, the school choir and orchestra and in individual recitals such as the Silver Tablet. The school has developed systems to monitor individual achievement over time. These could be strengthened, in line with the school's vision for education, to engage young people more fully in reflecting on their own progress.

In the nursery and prep classes, children progress very well in early reading, writing and mathematics. They are developing effective skills in literacy, numeracy, science and technology. In the junior school, children progress very well within their broad general education, particularly in English and mathematics. They apply literacy and numeracy skills well to areas of their learning. Across the junior and senior school, children and young people have a good understanding of the importance of health and wellbeing. By the upper stages of

the senior school, Scottish Qualification results reflect the school's very high academic standards. Individuals are very successful both in terms of the number of qualifications they obtain and the quality of their awards. In recent years, the school has been particularly successful in raising the bar by increasing the proportion of A awards at Higher and Advanced Higher levels. Almost all young people proceed to higher education.

How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

The school is very effective at supporting children and young people to develop and learn. St Columba's provides a very broad and balanced curriculum. Staff plan enjoyable learning experiences which enable learners to attain and achieve very well. The school offers a balance of sporting, cultural, aesthetic, community service, environmental education and enterprise experiences. Staff promote personal and social development exceptionally well, taking full account of school aims and values. Staff have made very effective use of Curriculum for Excellence to develop courses which promote enjoyment, personalisation, challenge and choice in learning. They are embedding literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in children and young people's learning. In the prep class, staff need to review the balance between routines and activities led by adults and those where children could take more of a lead. The senior school curriculum is individualised through very good course choices which include carefully planned arrangements for young people not aspiring to higher education. Faculty weeks, health activities, the biennial art exhibition and the choice to study Chinese history and culture all enhance young people's experiences. The S6 experience promotes leadership and teambuilding skills very well. Plans exist to include drama and religious education in the senior school. Senior managers plan to increase the pace of curricular developments in the junior school. Assessment is the next school priority.

Staff are caring and work hard to meet children and young people's varied needs. In the nursery and prep classes, children's learning is most effective when staff engage with individuals and small groups. Whole group activities do not always meet children's needs. Parents work very well with staff through 'active learning' sessions. Overall, across the junior and senior schools, teachers ensure that tasks, activities and resources are very well matched to the needs of learners. In most lessons observed, work was pitched at a suitable level of pace and challenge. In a few lessons, children and young people's needs could be better met. Arrangements for meeting the needs of children and young people who require extra support with their learning are highly effective. Class teachers know their role in supporting learning in the first instance. Other teachers and staff also support children and young people very well. School attainment results demonstrate that, taken together, approaches for meeting learners' needs are very successful. By the end of their career in school, all learners' needs have been very well met.

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

There is a strong and established culture of improvement through self-evaluation at St Columba's. The rector is highly effective and provides very strong leadership. Senior managers engage in various activities which support individual staff members. This helps to ensure that the school continually improves. A strong drive has resulted in learning being more active. The school seeks the views of staff, parents and learners. Outcomes of self-evaluation build on strengths and address areas for improvement. There is scope to develop these approaches further, particularly to increase the involvement of young people and parents in identifying priorities. The rector, board of governors and education committee set very high expectations. Staff are committed and work to these high standards. The staff training programme helps improve learning and teaching. Taken together, the school's approaches are creating leadership roles for staff at all levels. It is clear from children and young people's performance, that the school has successfully improved learning and teaching

and raised the already very high levels of attainment even further, through very effective arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Our inspection of your school and nursery and prep classes found the following key strengths.

- Leadership of the rector and the senior management team.
- Supportive and caring learning environment with highly committed staff promoting achievement and success for all.
- Staff's willingness to take on additional roles which result in school improvement.
- Confident, articulate and well-motivated children and young people who enjoy high quality learning experiences.
- The school's arrangements for supporting children and young people's learning to achieve of their best in their learning.
- Children and young people's performance, including high levels of achievement in a broad range of areas and high levels of attainment in certificate examinations.

We discussed with staff and the board of governors how they might continue to improve the school and nursery and prep classes. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue taking forward their plans and priorities for improving the school.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF THE INSPECTION?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the school.

Moira Cummings
HM Inspector
30 August 2011

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the HMIE website at <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/ViewEstablishment.aspx?id=9916&type=2>.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website www.hmie.gov.uk. Alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA or by telephoning 01506 600259.