

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

NIDDRIE MILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

APRIL 2006

•EDINBURGH•
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

Niddrie Mill Primary School is a non-denominational primary school built in 1895 which serves the area of east Edinburgh. The catchment area is one of multi-deprivation. The area is in the process of regeneration developments and has positive action status.

Niddrie Mill Primary School has 11 classrooms. The school building also includes a computer suite, a learning support base, a library, a behaviour support room, two Place2Be rooms, a music room, a resources room, a gym hall, a dining hall, a parents' room and two general purpose rooms. The school grounds have a container to store the playground equipment.

The current school roll is 251. There are 11 classes in the school.

Thirty seven district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2005. There were also eight non-district pupils and one late enrolment in P1.

The absence rate for 2004–2005 was 30 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 20 and 19 respectively. There were 20 formal exclusions during the period.

The acting headteacher (HT) is supported by the depute headteacher (DHT). There is one principal teacher (PT) and there are visiting teachers for physical education (PE), music and guitar.

The pupil teacher ratio is 14:1. In addition, 17 support staff are allocated to a range of whole-school responsibilities.

The pupil unit cost for 2005–2006 is £4058, compared to authority and national averages of £3024 and £3085 respectively. There is a School Board and parent teacher association (PTA).

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

National testing in reading, writing and mathematics is fully established at all stages. The school's current performance in relation to national 5–14 attainment targets is:

	2003	2004	2005	2005 target
Reading	46%	42%	49%	55%
Writing	34%	34%	35%	50%
Mathematics	33%	46%	60%	60%

Five pupils, one of whom has a Record of Needs, have been referred to psychological services.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Niddrie Mill Primary School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Development and Neighbourhood Management Groups of the Children and Families Department during February 2006. The review was based on the school's own standards and quality (S&Q) report for session 2004–2005. This was considered by the team to form an acceptable basis for review.

The review programme based on the S&Q report comprised two key areas:

- ✿ management, leadership and quality assurance;
- ✿ support for pupils;

plus the authority theme:

- ✿ continuity and progression in learning including transitions.

The review team considered statements made by the school about two key areas in the S&Q report, along with the authority theme, and made their evaluation on the basis of evidence provided by the school and their own observations. The results of their findings are given below as a commentary on the school's report.

In order to make their evaluation, the team consulted a number of school documents,

including the school improvement plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 14 lessons were observed. A questionnaire was issued to a sample of parents.

PARENTS’/CARERS’ VIEWS

Fifty one questionnaires were sent to parents/ carers and nine were returned.

All parents/carers said that their child enjoyed being at school. They knew that their child would be helped if he or she was having difficulty and they felt that the school had good materials and equipment for learning and teaching. Most parents/carers were satisfied with the homework their child received and felt confident that the school would respond if they raised a matter of concern.

Of the 30 questionnaires sent to parents/carers of children in the nursery classes, too few parents/carers responded to enable reliable conclusions to be drawn.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review team agreed with the following statements from the school’s S&Q report:

- ❁ Classroom practice has been monitored by the acting HT.
- ❁ Termly class letters have been successful in informing parents of intended learning outcomes. These have proved a point of referral for parents.
- ❁ Staff development on teaching and learning has ensured learning intentions and success criteria are being shared effectively in most classes.
- ❁ All staff have participated in the consultative process using quality indicators and have contributed to action planning on inservice days.

- ❁ Development plans have been consistently monitored and discussed with teachers.

Overall, management, leadership and quality assurance was very good.

Strengths in management, leadership and quality assurance

The acting HT provided very good leadership for the school. Staff, pupils and parents felt she was approachable, and considered her interpersonal skills to be particularly strong. Staff and pupils valued her daily visits to class, and the support she offered through team teaching and working with individual pupils. The acting HT promoted good teamwork among the staff and was supported by a strong SMT.

The definition of remits within the SMT was clear, and all staff had a good understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. The DHT fulfilled her role very competently. She had overall responsibility for the nursery and early years, and staff at these stages felt very well supported. The acting PT ably fulfilled her role in curricular support, and the business manager managed the budget and financial arrangements very effectively.

The management team met regularly, and copies of the agenda and minutes were kept of their formal weekly meetings.

Curricular and whole school policies were reviewed regularly at staff meetings in line with improvement plan priorities. Staff had access to all current documentation. All teaching staff were involved in the self-evaluation process, using quality indicators to review progress with the previous year’s improvement plan and to identify priorities for the following session. Working groups had been established to address key aspects of the plan, and staff felt involved and informed of developments.

A range of whole school measures to raise attainment had been successfully introduced. These included formative assessment strategies,

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a new programme of study in mathematics, a revised writing policy, and the development of consistent approaches to listening and talking. Individual members of staff had made very positive contributions to these measures, to policy making and to sharing practice with colleagues. This devolved leadership was commendable, and had resulted in very effective teamwork at all levels.

A clear and comprehensive programme for monitoring learning and teaching had been agreed and was implemented by SMT. An in depth audit of learning and teaching had taken place and would inform future practice. The acting HT and DHT provided written and verbal feedback on forward plans with an emphasis on formative comments regarding whole school approaches. Pupils' work was reviewed on a regular basis. There was a clear programme for sharing classroom experience, again with a focus on whole school issues.

Opportunities had been taken by some staff to shadow colleagues and to share good practice. Further support for staff to meet personal and school targets was provided through allowing attendance at courses within the school day where appropriate.

Parents felt that communication was good. They received regular newsletters which gave good information and advice. Class teachers made individual comments in pupils' reading records and parents felt able to respond and communicate through this.

Areas for development in management, leadership and quality assurance

The SMT should ensure that remits, budgets and minutes of management and working party meetings are made available to all staff.

Stronger links should be developed between the school and the PTA.

The learning and teaching policy should be finalised, as planned.

Opportunities for staff to engage in peer evaluation should be extended.

2 SUPPORT FOR PUPILS

The review team agreed with the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ✦ The acting HT has liaised on a monthly basis with learning support staff to ensure effectiveness of the new policy.
- ✦ Clear targets have been set in individualised educational programmes (IEPs).
- ✦ There is dedicated time for consultation with class teachers.
- ✦ Support staff have been strategically deployed.
- ✦ Place2Be is now firmly established as an integral support system within school.

Overall, support for pupils was very good.

Strengths in support for pupils

There was very good deployment of staff to provide a comprehensive range of support for pupils. Support for learning staff worked alongside staff in the classroom and worked successfully with individuals and small groups in the support for learning base. Learning assistants provided excellent support for pupils both in ongoing classwork and in supporting individual pupil programmes. Their knowledge of pupils and commitment to the school was highly commendable. The behaviour support teacher and the teacher for English as an Additional Language were confident and skilled in their area of focus.

Support for learning staff provided high-quality training and valuable support to staff in the identification of strategies and teaching materials for individual pupils. They were an excellent and highly-valued source of information on current educational thinking and research in learning. One member of support for learning staff had developed innovative approaches to working with pupils with dyslexia. This was having a very positive impact on individual pupils.

The support for learning policy was clear and current, and was implemented effectively across the school. Very thorough systems and procedures were in place. These allowed teaching staff and learning assistants to access support to meet individual pupil needs and to provide further support themselves.

Class teachers were confident in using a range of strategies to address needs. These included pair and group work, differentiation by pace and by task, and use of lap top computers.

All staff contributed to the ethos of raising aspirations and expectations through the use of positive discipline, praise, and reward systems. This message was reinforced at assemblies. The school had taken a lead in implementing an emotional literacy programme which was having a clear impact on the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Almost all staff were alert to the emotional and social needs of pupils. The classroom ethos was supportive with visual reminders of strategies displayed on the walls around the school and, in some cases, provided as a support for individual pupils.

Pupils were encouraged to discuss their learning needs. One group of pupils openly discussed the challenges they faced in learning because of specific difficulties and strategies to overcome these. Another group of pupils was being challenged in their learning through involvement in activities on the theme of Scottish literature.

In the nursery, teachers planned well to meet children's needs and aspirations. Children were encouraged to work independently, but were given help as appropriate.

Additional support was available in school through the Place2Be. Support was offered in the form of individual sessions for pupils who had been referred by the class teacher. Pupils could also self refer. Time for quiet reflection and private discussion was offered during lunchtimes by the Place-2-Talk and this had proved very successful for some pupils.

In the playground, the majority of pupils were engaged, happy, and related well to one another. There was a quiet area, and areas designated for ball games and other activities. A significant positive feature was the high profile of adults in the playground to support the social development of pupils.

Area for development in support for pupils

The school should evaluate their work in emotional literacy and continue to develop strategies to embed the programme.

3 CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION IN LEARNING INCLUDING TRANSITIONS

The review team agreed with the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ✿ Transition from nursery to primary and from primary to secondary is well planned and links and liaison are consistent and ongoing.
- ✿ There is a clear procedure for the transfer of information about pupils from class to class and liaison with learning support.
- ✿ Teachers and senior management are given regular, updated results following submission of test results by the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) so that they have an ongoing record of pupil performance. These are discussed regularly at planning liaison meetings.

Overall, continuity and progression in learning including transitions was very good.

Strengths in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

The transition process between nursery and primary was very good. There was an established timetable of events and visits to the primary school for children from the nursery class and from other feeder nursery schools. Links with other nursery schools were excellent. Throughout the school year, the children attended assemblies, and had classes with music and PE specialists, so they were familiar with the school

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building and with members of staff from the primary school.

The transition programme was very well supported by Family Learning who had established strong links with a number of parents.

An effective key worker system supported children on entry to nursery. Continuity from stage to stage was assured through discussion with the class teacher and through passing on folders of work from one teacher to the next.

The transition programme provided by the associated secondary school was excellent. There were regular timetabled visits throughout P7 to allow pupils to experience a range of activities in art, home economics, craft, design and technology, science and modern languages. These visits had had a positive impact on the P7 pupils. Primary staff valued the opportunity to meet the secondary staff on both a formal and informal basis to allow for the exchange of information.

Time had been set aside for support for learning staff to meet formally with teaching staff. Discussion focussed on details of pupil progress and suggested strategies to continue support.

In addition to the three day visit to the secondary school in the summer term, an orientation visit was organised for pupils in need of additional support. An intervention programme had been designed to identify and challenge more able pupils at the transition stage. Commendably, a member of staff from the secondary school visited the parents of every pupil intending to take up a place at that school and arranged for the parents to visit the school if they wished.

At all stages in the primary school, records of work were kept well up-to-date and were monitored regularly by the acting HT and DHT. At the end of each school year, the acting HT provided liaison time for class teachers to meet one another and to discuss the classes they were

receiving. There were very good arrangements in place for the communication of information between all staff involved in support for learning, including representatives from outside agencies.

Whole school programmes of study were in place for most curricular areas, including English language, science and mathematics. The implementation of the authority's mathematics planners was ensuring continuity and progression in this subject. Clear consultation had taken place with staff regarding the implementation, which had been further supported by the acquisition of extra resources.

Approaches to learning and teaching were consistent across most classes. However, there was an issue regarding lack of continuity due to staff absence. The school had worked hard to confront this issue and had provided clear information and planning support for supply staff.

Areas for development in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

A more consistent approach should be developed for identifying next steps in pupils' jotters and for sharing attainment targets with pupils.

Continuity and progression in the curriculum and in learning and teaching should be appraised in light of A Curriculum for Excellence.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✦ The warm, welcoming atmosphere and the friendly pupils.
- ✦ The excellent cluster events, particularly in PE.
- ✦ The high quality of support for learning provided by all staff.
- ✦ The strong and supportive headteacher and senior management team.
- ✦ The hard work and commitment of all staff.

Areas for development by the school

- ❄ The learning and teaching policy should be discussed fully with staff, as planned, and implemented consistently across the school.
- ❄ New legislation for pupils with additional support needs should be implemented.
- ❄ The programme for emotional literacy should be evaluated and embedded.
- ❄ A consistent approach should be developed for identifying next steps and sharing targets with pupils.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the school’s S&Q report is a good reflection of the current development position.

The school will be supported to produce an action plan to meet the main recommendations in this report.

Examples of good practice identified in the commendable features will be recorded to enable their wider dissemination across the authority.

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