

QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL REVIEW

COMISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

OCTOBER 2005

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THE SCHOOL IN CONTEXT

Comiston Primary School is a non-denominational primary school built in 1969 which serves the area of south east Edinburgh. The catchment area comprises of a residential area.

Comiston Primary School has 14 classrooms. The school building also includes a computer suite, a hall, a television area, a store room, and an infant area. The school grounds have trees, tarmac and a slabbed area.

The current school roll is 273. There are 11 classes in the school, organised as follows:

P1a	P1b	P2a	P2/3	P3
18	16	27	24	30
			15/9	
P4a	P4/5	P5	P6	P6/7
29	22	31	28	22
	9/13			10/12
P7				
26				

Twenty three district pupils enrolled in P1 in August 2004 and seven district pupils enrolled elsewhere. There were also 11 non-district pupils enrolled in P1.

The absence rate for 2003-2004 was 12 half days per pupil. This compares with authority and national averages of 18. There were no formal exclusions during the period.

The teaching staff in 2004-2005 was:

Basic Complement	PA/Sfl*
13.4 FTE**	0.80 FTE
Visiting Specialist(s)	Absence Cover
0.39 FTE	0.38 FTE

*Positive action/support for learning **Full time equivalent

The headteacher (HT) is supported by the depute headteacher (DHT). There is one principal teacher (PT) and there are visiting teachers for physical education (PE), information communications technology (ICT), art, brass and support for learning.

The pupil teacher ratio is 18:1. In addition, 10 support staff are allocated to a range of whole-school responsibilities.

The HT and all members of the teaching and support staff have entered the professional review and staff development and review scheme.

The pupil unit cost for 2003-2004 was £2495, compared to authority and national averages of £3823 and £3537 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:

	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05*
Reading	92%	90%	98%	92%	92%	92%
Writing	88%	83%	92%	90%	93%	91%
Mathematics	88%	90%	91%	85%	94%	91%

*2005 Target

Eight pupils, one of whom has a Record of Needs, have been referred to psychological services. The school is due to amalgamate with Hunter's Tryst Primary School from August 2005.

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THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The current school development plan covers the period 2004-2005 and targets the following main priorities:

- ❖ to develop a whole school framework for environmental studies to accommodate changes in guidelines and topics;
- ❖ to prepare staff and pupils for the proposed merger with Hunter's Tryst Primary School;
- ❖ to raise attainment in mathematics; and
- ❖ to implement new formative assessment guidelines.

The review programme based on the standards and quality (S&Q) report comprised two key areas:

- ❖ ethos;
- ❖ learning and teaching;

plus the authority theme:

- ❖ continuity and progression in learning including transitions.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Comiston Primary School was reviewed by a team from the Quality Development and Neighbourhood Management Groups of the Children and Families Department during May 2005. The review was based on the school's own S&Q report for session 2003-2004. This was considered by the team to form an acceptable basis for review.

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 development plan, interviewed samples of pupils, staff and parents, and observed learning and teaching. In total, 11 lessons were observed. A questionnaire was issued to a sample of parents.

Eighty-five questionnaires were sent to parents and 22 were returned.

Parents' views

All parents said that:

- ❖ the school has a good reputation in the community.

Almost all parents said that:

- ❖ their child enjoys being at the school;
- ❖ their child finds the activities stimulating and challenging;
- ❖ their child is encouraged to work to the best of his/her ability;
- ❖ their child's teacher really knows their child as an individual;
- ❖ their child is treated fairly by his/her teachers;
- ❖ they get regular, accurate and helpful information about their child's progress in school work;
- ❖ teachers are good at letting them know what part they can play in their child's education;
- ❖ they are confident that if they raise a matter of concern the school will do something about it;
- ❖ they are content with the part they are asked to play in their child's education;
- ❖ they come away from parent-teacher meetings feeling they have learned something useful;
- ❖ pupils are generally well behaved;
- ❖ teachers deal effectively with bad behaviour;
- ❖ the school is well led; and
- ❖ the school has good materials and equipment for learning and teaching.

Most primary parents said that:

- ❁ they are satisfied with the homework their child receives;
- ❁ they know that if their child is having difficulty he/she will be helped; and
- ❁ the school has explained to them what part they can play in their child's education.

The majority of parents said:

- ❁ the school has good accommodation.

FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

1 ETHOS

The review team was able to confirm all of the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ❁ The school ethos is very good.
- ❁ Parents and visitors comment on the welcoming atmosphere.
- ❁ The school recognises the importance of a school/home partnership.
- ❁ Staff have high expectations of children's performance and behaviour.
- ❁ The school's positive behaviour policy is supported by extensive use of praise, rewards and a clear discipline code.
- ❁ Examples of pupils' work and photographs are on display throughout the school.
- ❁ The recommended school uniform is worn by most children.
- ❁ Staff acknowledge the contribution that parents make to the school.
- ❁ All school events are well supported by parents.
- ❁ A number of strategies are in place to support pupils' efforts.
- ❁ The weekly school assembly offers the opportunity to acknowledge positive behaviour.
- ❁ The school benefits considerably from the work of the PTA.
- ❁ The School Board is particularly active in seeking parents' views.

- ❁ Parents' concerns are taken seriously.
- ❁ The school recognises and values good communication with parents.
- ❁ The school seeks immediate parental involvement when a child's behaviour causes concern.
- ❁ Staff recognise that bullying exists and respond quickly to parents' concerns about possible bullying incidents.

Overall, the school's ethos was very good.

Strengths in ethos

There was a positive, supportive atmosphere throughout the school. Staff, pupils and parents fully shared a keen sense of identity with, and pride in, the school and its achievements. All pupils wore the school uniform on a regular basis.

The environment was conducive to ensuring a purposeful approach for the children. The classrooms were well organised and very attractive displays of pupils' work throughout the school helped to create a stimulating context for learning and teaching.

Pupils considered their teachers to be approachable and relationships between staff and pupils were of high quality. Warmth, encouragement and mutual respect were in evidence in classrooms where praise was used effectively. As a result, pupils were confident and demonstrated high self-esteem.

Morale was high among staff and there was a good team spirit, which contributed to the positive ethos. The senior management team (SMT) was very approachable and responded timeously to issues raised by staff.

Standards of behaviour were generally very good throughout the school. Staff worked very hard to promote positive attitudes. The pupils were very well motivated by the positive behaviour reward system, which was implemented very effectively within the school.

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There was a well-established playground committee consisting of pupils from P5 to P7 and the playground reward system in operation made a significant contribution to positive behaviour at break times. This was supported by a very effective playground buddying programme efficiently organised by the DHT and ably implemented by P7 volunteers.

An anti-bullying policy was in place with clear guidelines to support its implementation. A race equality policy had also been developed along with procedures for monitoring its effectiveness.

The active pupil council members and the P7 House Captains made a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

Staff had high expectations of the pupils in all aspects of school life. Their achievements were valued through an extensive awards system, which included certificates, letters home and acknowledgement on the achievement board. Regular school assemblies provided good opportunities for celebration. Commendably, the achievements of staff were also recognised on these occasions.

Parents considered themselves to be very much partners in their children's education. They worked cooperatively with the staff and supported and participated in the life of the school in a planned and purposeful way. The School Board took a keen interest in the life of the school and was very actively involved. Within the community, the school had close links with the Jardine Day Hospital.

The PTA organised a wide variety of after-school activities such as gymnastics, French conversation and skiing. The association was also very active in raising funds for the school.

Communication with parents was effective and wide-ranging through the use of leaflets, videos, newsletters, including the monthly Comiston Notes, and a newly developed school website. The latter, which was maintained by a member of staff, had been well received by the parent body.

Areas for development in ethos

The HT should take steps to provide a summary of the school's S&Q report and development plan to every family in the school.

The school should ensure that pupils have more opportunities to work collaboratively and take more responsibility for decision making.

The pupil council should be further developed by delegating responsibilities for chairing and minute taking to the pupils.

2 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The review team was able to confirm almost all of the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ❖ Classroom support is provided effectively by promoted staff.
- ❖ Continual assessment of all pupils is carried out by staff.
- ❖ In general, we would judge the quality of teaching and learning to vary from good to very good.
- ❖ Staff use a variety of teaching methods including academic groupings, whole class lessons and attention to pupils who require individual support.
- ❖ The work of the support for learning staff is invaluable in providing advice and resources for colleagues as well as taking learning groups and preparing individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils who require focused help.

Overall learning and teaching was good.

Strengths in learning and teaching

There was a well-constructed learning and teaching policy which had a strong focus on formative assessment, different learning styles and highlighted the four phase model for learning recommended in the authority guidelines. This policy should now be augmented by guidelines to support its implementation.

The use of ICT to support learning and teaching was evident throughout the school. Good use was made of the ICT suite. More effective use could be made of the classroom-based computers to develop and extend learning experiences.

Forward planning was in place for every area of the curriculum. Plans covered yearly overviews and medium-term forecasts. Written feedback to staff was affirming and positive and included reflective comment.

Opportunities for stage partner teachers to plan collaboratively were given at each of the four forward planning blocks.

The SMT monitored classroom practice through a programme of sharing classroom experience. After each session the opportunity to discuss the lesson was offered and written feedback given.

The learning environment in classrooms was stimulating and supportive of positive approaches to learning. Pupils were well motivated and actively engaged in lessons. They listened attentively, were enthusiastic and showed a clear understanding of what had been taught.

Almost all teachers shared the purpose of lessons with pupils at the outset and clearly explained what would be assessed. However, the pace of learning for some pupils could have been accelerated to ensure that each pupil was always appropriately challenged.

There was a strong emphasis on valuing individual pupil achievement. Pupils' contributions within lessons and activities were encouraged, valued and developed by staff.

Commendably, in all lessons observed care was taken to involve all pupils.

Learning assistants were highly valued and provided very good direct support to pupils over a range of learning activities. However, they should be included more systematically at target setting and forward planning meetings for specific pupils.

There were appropriate systems in place to identify pupils with additional support needs and IEPs were in place for a number of pupils. The support for learning teacher made a positive contribution towards meeting the needs of identified pupils in tutorial groups and classes from P1-P7.

A range of formal and informal assessment procedures were employed which enabled teachers to make informed judgements about pupil progress.

Formative assessment was in the early stages of development. Staff across the school were piloting a number of strategies including peer and self-assessment. There were some excellent examples of formative written comments on pupils' work. This very good practice needed to be shared across the school.

The work on formative assessment should now be consolidated and a framework for implementation agreed by staff to ensure consistency and cohesion.

Written reports to parents provided clear information and detailed how their child was progressing in the main curricular areas. Parents interviewed were satisfied with the communication they received.

Parents were encouraged to communicate with the school. Enquires about attainment and progress were met with a prompt response and opportunities to meet with teachers were readily available.

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Areas for development in learning and teaching

The school now needs to review the forward planning procedures to ensure they include details of expected outcomes and the use of assessment information to identify next steps in learning for the pupils.

The school should review the support for learning policy to ensure that pace and challenge is improved for the identified gifted and talented pupils.

The homework policy should be revised in consultation with parents and pupils to ensure that it complements the work of the school and is more stimulating and motivational for pupils.

At all stages in the school, consideration should be given to providing appropriate opportunities for pupils to exercise choice in their tasks and activities and to encourage more independent learning.

The school needs to develop a structured approach to weekly planning including the development of a shared format.

3 CONTINUITY AND PROGRESSION IN LEARNING INCLUDING TRANSITIONS

The review team was in partial agreement with the following statements from the school's S&Q report:

- ❁ A meeting with parents of prospective P1 pupils is held in June. The pupils attend for an afternoon before the end of the session. A follow-up meeting for parents is held in September before the pupils attend for a full day.
- ❁ Forward plans are submitted for scrutiny at the start of each term. Plans are comprehensive and demonstrate continuity from P1-P7.

Overall, continuity and progression in learning including transitions was fair.

Strengths in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

The authority transition document was consistently well used to pass information on children entering P1 from Hunter's Tryst Primary School nursery class. These records supported continuity and learning for the pupils.

Parents were positive about the transition process. They found the staff welcoming and approachable and considered the arrangements provided a satisfactory start to primary school education.

In addition to an induction half day for the P1 intake a curriculum evening was arranged for parents annually in September. Parents valued the information shared on these occasions.

Arrangements were in place to transfer pupil information from stage to stage across the school. Individual pupil profiles containing samples of work gathered throughout the session provided accumulative three-year records of progress and achievement from P1 to P7. The HT provided clear guidance on the content of these profiles.

Class teachers were allocated designated time to engage in structured meetings at the end of each session to ensure the transfer of pupil attainment, achievement and other significant information to receiving teachers.

To facilitate continuity between the support for learning teacher and class teachers, regular meetings were held to discuss targets for pupils with IEPs and forward plans for tutorial groups.

Pupils were making continuous progress within their learning. They were aware of their attainment levels. This progress would be further enhanced by the identification of future action in learning within teachers' forward plans and the sharing of these next steps with the pupils.

An effective school programme for spelling had been developed and was being implemented across the stages ensuring continuous progression in this area.

Transition arrangements from P7 to S1 with respect to pastoral support were good. These included open evenings for parents and pupils, a three-day induction programme, staff visits and a well-supported summer school.

Good primary to secondary arrangements were in place for pupils with additional needs. Staff from the secondary school attended review meetings for pupils with IEPs. Long term targets in draft form were set for the end of S1 for these pupils.

Additional visits to the secondary school were arranged for vulnerable pupils.

Areas for development in continuity and progression in learning including transitions

The school, in full consultation with parents and the pre-5 centre, should develop a comprehensive programme for transition from nursery to P1.

A strategy to ensure effective curriculum progression between the primary and the secondary school should be developed as a matter of priority.

Clear procedures for predicting and tracking pupil progress need to be developed and implemented consistently across the school.

The school should review the content and organisation of the pupils' profiles. This would ensure that the information gathered effectively supported the transition process from one stage to another.

The school should continue to develop communication with parents, particularly to inform them of all the curriculum planned for their children at the start of each session.

The school had taken steps to identify gifted and talented pupils. In line with authority policy, steps should now be taken to ensure these pupils have their learning needs met.

As a matter of priority a cluster improvement plan should be developed and implemented, thus ensuring more curricular cohesion between the secondary and the associated primary schools.

SUMMARY

Commendable features

- ✿ The very positive ethos throughout the school where pupils, staff and parents are valued and respected.
- ✿ The close partnership between home and school in supporting pupils' learning.
- ✿ The very well behaved, polite and courteous pupils.
- ✿ The quality of teaching throughout the school was mostly good and often very good.
- ✿ The strategies used to celebrate and recognised the achievements of pupils and staff.

Areas for development by the school

- ✿ The school should revise the forward planning procedures to ensure they detail expected outcomes and next steps in learning.
- ✿ A comprehensive nursery to P1 transition programme should be developed and implemented.
- ✿ An improvement plan to ensure effective curriculum progression from P7 to S1 should be developed in partnership with the cluster schools and the secondary school.
- ✿ Procedures for predicting and tracking pupil progress should be agreed and implemented consistently across the school.

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The school's self-evaluation, as represented in its S&Q report, was considered to be mainly well-judged. Overall, the school's S&Q report is a good reflection of the current development position.

Areas for development by the authority

- ✿ The authority should support the school in the development of an action plan to address the main recommendations in this report.
- ✿ Examples of good practice should be entered in the database of good practice to enable their wider dissemination to other schools.

Very good:	Major Strengths
Good:	Strengths outweigh weaknesses
Fair:	Some important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory:	Major weaknesses
Almost all:	90% plus
Most:	75% plus
Majority:	50% plus
Some:	15% plus
Few:	Less than 15%

