



## **Department of Educational and Social Services**

**Onthank Primary School  
Helping You Improve Report  
March 2011**

**Quality Improvement Team  
Working in, with and on behalf of Educational Establishments in East Ayrshire**

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## **1. FOCUS OF REVIEW**

The purpose of this report is to provide information to assist Onthank Primary School in further developing learning and teaching and the experiences and outcomes for children and young people

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** Onthank Primary School is a non-denominational establishment serving the Onthank area of Kilmarnock and includes a Gaelic nursery class, nursery class and primary department which serves East Ayrshire Council. The school is part of the James Hamilton Learning Community.

## **3. LEADERSHIP TEAM PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION**

- 3.1** The leadership and management team consists of the headteacher, depute head teacher and 6 principal teachers. They work very well together, complementing each other's role in managing improvements by sharing expertise.

There is a proactive and energetic approach in engaging with staff and pupils and in taking the school forward. The headteacher knows the school very well and has a clear vision and sense of direction which is shared by all staff. The senior management team (SMT) have built a strong ethos and sense of identity of the school in the community.

The professional dialogue with the senior leadership team focused on learning and teaching; self-evaluation; partnership working and collegiality; and the school's plan for continuous improvement. There are high expectations regarding the quality of learning and of behaviour from staff, pupils and parents. Overall pupil performance, reflected by levels of attainment and achievement, is very high. The school improvement plan clearly sets out relevant priorities linked to national and local initiatives, based on self evaluation and an appropriate pace of change. All stakeholders are involved in the process.

- 3.2** Key strengths identified by the headteacher and depute headteacher through classroom observation and discussions with staff are:

- The depth and quality of learning
- Staff who are committed, reflective and eager to improve learning
- Distributive leadership, with the majority of staff committed to taking a lead role
- Assessment is for learning strategies embedded in teaching approaches
- Staff responsiveness to the needs and interests of children
- Teamwork with teaching and support staff working well together
- The introduction of peer observation as part of the Teacher Learning Community programme, which involves the majority of staff
- Pupils involvement in planning and leadership roles
- Development of ICT to support teaching and communication
- Monthly newsletters which are available as electronic or paper versions
- Strong parental involvement through the Parent Council and PTA
- Whole school approaches to eco school status and equality and fairness.

- 3.3** Staff work very well together and opportunities to share good practice are facilitated. Staff are encouraged to evaluate teaching approaches and reflect on the nature of the learning experiences they provide for the children and young people. Cross curricular approaches consistent with Curriculum for Excellence are being developed to help pupils to make connections in their learning and topic structures are being reviewed to take account of this. Stage partners plan together taking account of pupils' interests and oral feedback is given by SMT to ensure progression and prevent duplication.
- 3.4** The leadership team have an established range of monitoring and tracking systems and the processes for self evaluation are comprehensive. There is a clear annual calendar for monitoring the work of the school. Monitoring is done through planned observations, sampling of children's work and examination of teacher's planning. Feedback is recorded and shared with individual teachers. Staff are involved in the evaluation process, following the planned programme of class observations which focus on aspects of the curriculum or learning and teaching. The visits are making an impact on school improvement in areas such as children's writing and classroom displays. The value of the self-evaluation process is recognised by the majority of staff. Individual staff work together to influence change within the school, taking forward priorities in the improvement plan. Joint planning and developing a new system of reporting to parents has been a focus this session.
- 3.5** There is a very effective system in place for supporting probationers and newly qualified teachers. The PT provides support through a varied programme including weekly meetings with an agreed agenda which involves the probationers in identifying areas for discussion. Non class contact time is flexible and a daily slot is timetabled at the start of the session to allow preparation and classroom organisation. Modelling lessons and classroom observations also have a positive impact.

## **4 CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS**

- 4.1** The Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs) carried out formal class visits to almost all classes over two days, including visits to the Gaelic nursery and primary classes, observing either the beginning or conclusion of the activities. They engaged with pupils at intervals and had lunch with the children in the dining hall.
- 4.2** Pupils were extremely polite, well mannered and well behaved. Relationships between adults and pupils were very good. Most children were motivated in their learning and responded positively to teachers' instructions.
- 4.3** In all classes observed, pupils were engaged in their learning and were eager to learn. There was a good ethos for learning in almost all classes. Teachers prepared lessons very well and make extensive use of school resources. Learning intentions were on display and plenary sessions at the end of lessons were used to recap on what had been learned. CfE experiences and outcomes could be shared more explicitly with the children to develop greater responsibility for their learning. Active and interactive learning was evident in many classes especially at the early stages. Pupils were involved in formative

self and peer assessment and were given opportunities to reflect on their progress. A range of AifL approaches was evident in almost all classes. There was some evidence of interdisciplinary approaches, but most lessons focussed on discrete subjects and in a small number of cases, teaching was whole class focussed with little differentiation. A number of lessons showed creativity which captured the children's imagination as well as developing a range of skills. There were examples of learning in context where resources provided challenging extension work for more able pupils and topic work allowed pupils to research and present their learning to their peers. Pupils' work was showcased in attractive and relevant displays. Overall, teaching was of a high standard.

- 4.4** The school meets pupils' needs very well. Children on the Additional Support Needs log have ISPs or IEPs. Differentiation is considered when structuring classes and transition arrangements are designed to ensure support is targeted where it is needed most. Setting is used effectively in mathematics to meet learning needs including the more able. Due to limitations in capacity, support for learning is provided through small group extraction.

## **5. PUPIL FOCUS GROUPS**

- 5.1** The QIOs met with members of the pupil council and pupil representatives of the Eco Committee.
- 5.2** The pupils from the pupil council were extremely positive about their experiences at school. They are given many opportunities to develop teamwork.
- 5.3** Pupils are proud of their school and they think it has a good reputation. They feel that the teachers are friendly and helpful. They feel safe and looked after. Pupils from a diverse range of race and cultures attend the school and everyone feels respected and included. P6/7 support learning by taking the role of reading buddies for P1/2 pupils.  
Children have opportunities to go on school trips which help their learning. The Gaelic unit trips were valued by children attending the unit.
- 5.4** Behaviour is generally good and there is an excellent reward system which involves everyone and is based on the school's golden rules.  
Children appreciate the range of playground games and healthy eating initiatives which are examples of how they are cared for.  
Pupil achievement is recognised at regular assemblies and teachers also value their achievements in a variety of ways.  
Bullying is not an issue, but where incidents occur, they know who to approach and all agreed that any concerns are dealt with swiftly and appropriately.
- 5.5** The pupil council feel they have a voice and can influence the life of the school. The pupil council representatives ensure all pupils are consulted about changes to the school. They have been actively involved in improvements and are given responsibility to arrange a number of activities and events involving the whole school.

- 5.6** The eco committee were very positive about the school and the value placed on their role. There are representatives from all classes from primary 1 to 7. They have worked hard at involving the whole school in Eco activities including recycling, litter and development of the garden. All stages have responsibility for different aspects. The school has adopted a dolphin, a polar bear and a coral reef and have pen pals in a Sri Lankan school. World Book Day provided a focus for Eco competitions and they have also developed an Eco song.
- 5.7** School shows and musical activities are a major strength of the school. They are of a very high standard and enjoyed by all. There are a number of extra-curricular groups, after school and at lunchtime, which cater for a variety of interests as well as sports and athletic activities.
- 5.8** The only negative comments from the pupil council related to the need to restrict areas in the playground for football. Primary 7 pupils lack of commitment to improving the environment and the state of the boys' toilets were of concern to the eco committee.

## **6. PARENT FOCUS GROUP**

- 6.1** The QIOs also met with a group of parents.
- 6.2** The parents commented very positively regarding communication with the wider parent community and the leadership of the school. They expressed a sense of ownership of the school and highlighted its important role in the life of the community. They saw the teachers as enthusiastic and responsive in meeting the needs of their children. The school was inclusive in its approach and parental involvement was encouraged. Parents had access to staff at the end of the school day and felt that staff were proactive in dealing with issues.
- 6.3** Transitions arrangements were valued at all stages and parents and children are fully involved in the process. Parents spoke about the school's inclusive approach to additional support needs and welcomed the introduction of the new reporting format. They spoke with some knowledge about Curriculum for Excellence, exemplified through the life and ethos of the school, the confidence of the children, the extent to which CfE is influencing teaching methods and their children's enjoyment of active learning approaches. A discussion about personal learning planning was felt to be a positive development.
- 6.4** The leadership of the school by the headteacher was commended and the improvement in the school's reputation since he had come to the school had resulted in the increase in pupil numbers. The parents find the SMT visible, approachable and proactive in school improvement. There is respect for other cultures and equality of opportunities is a strength. They feel that their children are safe and well cared for at Onthank Primary School and also felt that if there was an issue of bullying the school would deal with it quickly and appropriately.

## **7. PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION WITH STAFF**

- 7.1** Officers met with the teaching staff after the school day on day one and support staff during the second day. There was also a meeting with the PT who mentors probationers and following this, a meeting with probationary teachers at their request.
- 7.2** There was a strong sense of identity and camaraderie within the staff, a shared vision for the school, and a willingness to work co-operatively for the benefit of the pupils. It was reported that the school atmosphere was superb and staff feel valued. Recent members of staff, including probationers, commented very favourably regarding the friendly, welcoming and supportive reception they had received.  
Staff skills are of a high quality and they share their expertise. Staff are hard working. The majority of staff are involved in the TLC and speak very favourably about the impact this is and will have on learning and teaching.
- 7.3** Staff commented on the well behaved children and the positive relationship between staff and pupils. There are high expectations of all children and staff. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated.  
The school has a good reputation in and beyond the community. Children are confident and take responsibility in a variety of areas.  
Support staff are encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions and collaborative working is in place at each stage and across stages.  
Staff contribute to school productions, including the annual "O" Factor and work collaboratively when teaching, as well as providing extracurricular activities. All staff support whole school activities which take place in the evening and they contribute their skills in a variety of ways.
- 7.4** Staff felt that the leadership team were approachable and provided support and challenge, as appropriate. Professional discussion takes place as part of the monitoring process and effort is recognised.  
Monthly newsletters are well received and celebrate the work of the school as well as providing a wealth of relevant information. Support staff have a weekly meeting with the DHT and problems are listened to and acted upon.  
Information is shared relating to children's health and all staff are trained in Child Protection procedures.
- 7.5** Support staff reported that behaviour has improved and that the reward system is very effective. This includes the weekly Golden Table which is adapted with regular themes e.g. Comic relief and Valentine's Day.  
The SMT are in the playground every day and this prevents incidents becoming an issue. The CLD link worker also supports pupils who are having difficulty in the playground. Communication is very effective and they all support each other in their different roles.  
The catering manager is involved in developing Hungry for Success menus which also focus on themes including an Italian Day and Pizza Party. The breakfast club provides breakfast daily to about 40 children.
- 7.6** The school has a good reputation for equality and inclusion. The Gaelic Unit is

included in school activities and also has involvement in the wider community and national events e.g. Celtic Connections. The range of activities enthral children. Thinking skills are a focus through the teaching of philosophy.

- 7.7** Parents are supportive of the work of the school and provide financial support to enable initiatives which lead to school improvement. There is a Parents Open afternoon and parents are always welcomed. Time is made to discuss and support any concerns parents and their children may have.

## **8. STRENGTHS AND HOW THE SCHOOL CAN IMPROVE**

### **8.1 Strengths of the school**

- A passion for learning and the enthusiastic leadership demonstrated by the senior leadership team and by all the staff
- Very well-behaved, confident children who are supportive of each other and who are keen to learn
- Very good teaching with examples of innovation, creativity and enterprise
- Approaches to implementing the principles and practices of CfE
- Commitment to wider achievement across the school
- Proactive approach to initiatives which enhance learning
- Communication, engagement with and involvement of parents
- Staff commitment to the self evaluation process and sharing good practice

### **8.2 How the school can improve**

- Provide further opportunities for staff to share good practice with each other to lead to a consistency of practice across the school
- Develop a robust tracking system for pupil attainment and achievement which is based on a shared understanding through the development of moderation and benchmarking
- Involve children further in their planning and setting targets
- Further develop opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, thus allowing children to make connections across a range of curricular experiences and outcomes.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1** Onthank Primary School provides a very good education for the children and young people. Leadership for learning is evident at all levels. There is a strong capacity for improvement. By addressing the recommendations set out above the school is very well placed to continue this process of improvement.