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Holy See Press Office Communiqué: Pope Francis visits the “Elisa Scala” Comprehensive Institute in Rome, as part of the “Mercy Friday” initiative

This afternoon, at 16.00, as part of the ongoing “Mercy Friday” initiative, the Holy Father Francis, accompanied as always by H.E. Msgr. Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization, paid a visit to the *Elisa Scala* Comprehensive Institute in Rome, a state school in the south-east outskirts of the capital, between the Borgata Finocchio and Borghesiana suburbs.

The *Elisa Scala* Comprehensive Institute was established in the 1950s; following the increase in the local population from the 1970s onwards, the Institute was extended with four more buildings, dispersed in the Borghesiana and Finocchio area, between Via di Rocca Cencia, Via di Motta Camastra and Via Roccaforte del Greco.

The Holy Father visited the central seat of the Institute in Via Nicotera. Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the head teacher, Professor Claudia Gentili, and by hundreds of boys and girls who were attending the Institute to participate in afternoon activities.

Professor Gentili recounted to Pope Francis the history of the Institute which, since October 2015, has been linked to that of the Scala family. Their daughter, little Elisa, who attended the first year of middle school (sixth grade) at the then *Via Rocca Camastra Comprehensive Institute*, tragically passed away due to leukaemia at the age of eleven. Elisa was a very lively and determined girl, and spoke often with her father and mother about her passion for books and libraries. When she died, it was the natural wish of her parents to propose to the school a project for making her dream come true: a room for books that could be attended by all young people. A few months later, in December 2015, “Elisa’s Library” was established – a space to be “filled with books”. Subsequently the initiative “Give a book for Elisa” was launched by her father Giorgio and mother Maria, addressed to whoever wished to contribute a small donation of books to “Elisa’s Library”. Thousands of texts were gathered, in various languages, all with a dedication to Elisa. Today there are more than twenty thousand books, sent from all regions in Italy, from Europe and even from Australia, and the library forms part of the circuit of Rome’s municipal libraries. Just a few months ago the Institute received permission from the Municipality of Rome and the Ministry of Public Instruction to be renamed in memory of little Elisa.

During his visit, the Pope met Elisa's parents who showed him the library rooms. The Holy Father spent a few minutes with them and donated several volumes to the library, each one dedicated to Elisa.

The pupils performed several songs to express the atmosphere of joy and welcome inspired by the Holy Father's unexpected visit. After greeting the president, the teachers, the school staff, the parents and the students, the Pope returned to the Casa Santa Marta.
