

**Strathdearn Primary School
Tomatin
The Highland Council**

30 August 2005

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1. Background

Strathdearn Primary School was inspected in May 2005 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, and a group of parents.

The school, which opened in August 2002, serves the village of Tomatin and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 56, including 17 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was well above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Courteous and hardworking pupils.
- High levels of attainment in English language.
- Accommodation and facilities.
- Relationships at all levels.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

The views of parents and carers were in almost all cases strongly positive and supportive of the school. Parents and carers felt welcome in the school and had confidence in the school's ability to respond to their concerns. A few parents thought that higher attaining pupils were not always fully challenged or given sufficient opportunities beyond the formal curriculum. About a quarter of those who responded sought more information about how they could help with homework and nearly half would have liked a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement. Pupils were proud of their school and felt happy and safe. All reported very good relationships with other pupils and staff. They appreciated the range of opportunities to help improve aspects of school life, such as developing the

playground facilities. All teachers felt that they gave pupils clear guidance on how to improve and that the school celebrated pupils' successes effectively. Almost all staff, parents and carers thought the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided a good, broad and balanced curriculum. Staff had developed new approaches to teaching science, health education and religious and moral education which had improved pupils' learning experiences. They did not yet make enough use of information and communications technology in all aspects of the curriculum. Pupils' experiences were enhanced by learning Gaelic songs supported by visiting artistes from Fèis Rois and by drama workshops. Teachers used praise and feedback effectively to encourage pupils. Staff shared the purposes of lessons and regularly revised previous work. They took good care to adapt their teaching approaches to suit pupils' learning needs.

All pupils worked well and required very little supervision. They were active learners and worked eagerly at the tasks given. They responded at length to teachers' questions and showed a good recall of previous work. Pupils responded enthusiastically when encouraged to work briskly and the activities set were suitably challenging. Teachers encouraged pupils to reflect on each other's work. Pupils worked well in groups to complete practical tasks or assignments. Homework was regular, but at times lacked challenge for higher attaining pupils. For these pupils, the pace of learning was sometimes too slow.

The pupil council had raised funds which were used to improve playground equipment and purchase games and other recreational activities. Pupils had learned the importance of contributing to village life through participation each year to the village Art Fair and exhibited plants at the annual Flower Show. The school had taken part in community development projects such as the salmon hatchery and pupils had learnt about the lifecycle of salmon. Pupils had monitored the use made of a range of bird boxes they had helped erect to learn about birds' nesting habits. All pupils had learned about caring for and supporting others by taking part in a range of fundraising events for charity. Many had participated in the local inter-schools athletics championships with considerable success.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. At all stages almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing and some were exceeding these. Pupils listened carefully to each other and to their teachers. They talked fluently in groups and volunteered insightful comments on books they had read for enjoyment. Almost all pupils were skilled in reading for information and had a good understanding of how writers achieved specific effects. However, their skills in reading for information would be enhanced by drawing on a wider range of sources, including the Internet. They had a strong appreciation of poetry

and a clear understanding of the main messages in a poem. Pupils at the early stages were developing very good skills in writing about information they had discovered and those in the middle and upper stages composed letters for a variety of purposes. At P4-P7, pupils produced some very good examples of extended imaginative writing and expressive poetry.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Across the school most pupils were achieving or exceeding appropriate national levels of attainment. Others who were experiencing difficulty with their learning were being well supported to make good progress by teachers and support staff. For a few pupils at the upper stages the pace was too slow and the tasks set lacked sufficient challenge. At P3, pupils ably discussed bar graphs they had created earlier. Pupils' skills in using computers to handle information and produce graphs were not well enough developed. Almost all pupils carried out mental calculations quickly and accurately and coped well with their classwork. At P1 to P3, pupils had very good knowledge of coin values. Almost all achieved well with coursework on subtraction. Almost all P7 pupils demonstrated good understanding of the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages. At P4 to P7, pupils were developing a good understanding of measuring area. At P5, pupils successfully carried out practical tasks in measuring area and perimeter. Those in P7 also showed a good understanding of the method of calculating the area of composite shapes and right-angled triangles. At all stages, pupils were making progress in developing skills in problem solving and had a good knowledge of the strategies needed to solve practical problems in mathematics.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff knew their pupils very well and had undertaken appropriate training to ensure that pupils with medical needs were well attended to. The school had clear procedures for child protection and anti-bullying, and for dealing with incidents where pupils' health might be at risk. Pupils knew how to keep themselves healthy through eating sensibly and exercising. All pupils felt safe and secure in the school and knew what to do if they had complaints or concerns.

The school had limited access to specialist support for learning staff. The school made very good use of the outcomes of multi-agency meetings to cater for pupils with additional support needs. Staff supported pupils with learning difficulties very well with well-targeted tasks and materials. Teachers' effective questioning and explanations helped pupils overcome difficulties in their learning. They did not as yet share learning targets for attainment with pupils to make them aware of how their learning could improve. Higher attaining pupils in P4-P7 required, in a number of instances, a faster pace of work and a wider range of challenging activities.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation and facilities was very good. The school was built as part of Highland Council's Public Private Partnership programme, and was opened in August 2002, replacing two smaller primary schools. Security arrangements were appropriate. Access for those with mobility difficulties was very good. Pupils benefited from up-to-date resources and facilities including a well-equipped gymnasium. Staff had not yet realised the full potential of the interior spaces to display pupils' finished work.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and pupil morale was high and relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils were very good. The school celebrated diversity very well and effectively encouraged pupils to respect difference in line with the school's racial equality policy. There were very good arrangements to consult with and involve pupils in improving the school. As a result, the school had improved playground games and facilities. Staff and pupils had high expectations for behaviour, courtesy and good discipline and for high attainment. Pupils' hard work and attainment were well celebrated in assemblies, but these achievements were not always sufficiently publicised beyond the school. The reception of visitors was well organised and welcoming. There were appropriate opportunities for religious observance. The bilingual Gaelic / English signage enhanced the school's atmosphere and reminded pupils of their Highland heritage.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>There were good links with parents, the School Board and the local community. The school made significant contributions to community events such as the annual art fair and Christmas concerts. Although the school kept parents well informed and offered opportunities for them to learn about its work, it had not shared its aims and priorities for improvement sufficiently widely. The school and the School Board should continue to work together to improve communication with all parents. Written reports to parents and carers gave clear progress reports and sound advice on the next steps needed in children's learning. The school consulted parents regularly on potentially sensitive aspects of its health education programme.</p>

7. Improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

Strathdearn Primary School provided its pupils with good opportunities to attain well. The school had a happy and secure atmosphere in which all pupils were valued and cared for. Pupils were encouraged to produce high quality work. Teaching had many strengths and pupils experiencing difficulties in their learning were well supported. Staff did not always ensure that higher attaining pupils achieved their full potential.

The headteacher provided good leadership. She had successfully developed an effective staff team and a distinctive ethos for the school. She had established a well-balanced curriculum which staff were continuing to build upon. Along with her staff, she had made an effective start to developing a robust system of quality assurance. The system for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress gave good guidance to staff who also found the headteacher's comments on their plans helpful. Regular discussions of pupils' progress and attainment with staff and classroom visits to observe learning and teaching helped develop and sustain effective approaches to improvement. Strathdearn Primary School was well placed to continue to serve its pupils well.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- improve the use of information and communications technology to broaden pupils' experiences in mathematics and English language;
- publicise the school's aims and priorities for improvement more widely; and
- ensure that higher attaining pupils are fully challenged.

What happens next?

The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report parents and carers will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector

30 August 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- The teaching process
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Self-evaluation
- Leadership
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be fair

- No aspects were found to be in this category

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The care and concern shown by staff. • The school's approaches to dealing with inappropriate behaviour. • Helpful and informative parents' evenings. • The mutual respect between staff and pupils. • Their children's enjoyment of school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on decisions affecting their children. • Information on the standards expected from pupils.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being in school. • Teachers explained things clearly. • Pupils' good behaviour. • Teachers checked homework. • Being helped to stay safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils had no significant concerns.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, Culture and Sport, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Longman East, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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