

**Muirtown Primary School  
The Highland Council**

**27 April 2004**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Key strengths</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5. How well are pupils supported?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6. How good is the environment for learning?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7. Improving the school</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Indicators of quality</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>How can you contact us?</b>	<b>10</b>

## **1. Background**

Muirtown Primary School was inspected in January 2004 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 and the environment for learning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents, to a sample of P4-P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team also met the chair of the School Board and a group of parents.

Muirtown Primary School serves an area in the west of Inverness. At the time of the inspection the roll was 325, including 39 in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

An integrated inspection of pre-school provision was carried out at the same time by HMIE and the Care Commission and is the subject of a separate report.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Very good teamwork amongst staff and relationships between staff and pupils.
- The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the work of the school.
- Examples of very good direct teaching.
- A broad range of achievement by pupils in music festivals and sporting competitions.
- The commitment of the headteacher and the staff to improving the school.
- Effective approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles.

## **3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff**

The inspection team found that parents and carers were very supportive of the school. Parents and carers felt they were made to feel welcome and that their children enjoyed school. A number expressed anxiety about the condition of the pathways and stairs leading to the school. Many praised the work of the headteacher in developing a strong partnership

with them and in responding quickly to their concerns. Staff appreciated the improvements to the curriculum and the school's ethos that the headteacher had achieved. Pupils praised the opportunities they had to take responsibility and to have a say in decision making, especially how monies were spent.

#### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

##### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The school had organised a very good, broad and balanced curriculum. In improving the curriculum, the headteacher had made innovative use of the flexibility time available to ensure full coverage of all curriculum areas. Teachers used the opportunities afforded by work in science, religious and moral education, health education and art and design to improve pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics. Pupils were responding well to the increasing use of information and communications technology in their class work. There were many examples of very good direct teaching. Most teachers used questions well to reinforce and extend pupils' learning. Imaginative arrangements for grouping pupils according to their aptitudes and abilities in the middle and upper stages had helped to meet pupils' needs successfully. In the early stages staff did not always build effectively on pupils' pre-school experiences to develop a faster pace of work. In P1 to P3 there were insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn through play. As a result, staff did not consistently ensure that pupils of all abilities were appropriately challenged at these stages.

Most teachers ensured a brisk pace in lessons and offered challenging activities, and pupils responded enthusiastically. In a few instances the pace was slow and tasks were not well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. As a result, pupils were not always suitably motivated to learn. Pupils with special educational needs were fully included in the work of their classes. Homework was regular and appropriately varied.

Senior pupils were active in supporting pupils in P1 or others who requested help through buddying and peer mediation schemes. From P1 onwards pupils took part in an effective school council which had been very successful in raising funds for improvements in the school's playground. Pupils enthusiastically took part in a wide range of sporting and musical events, with considerable success in many competitions. In physical education, pupils had steadily developed very good gymnastic skills. The school orchestra and choir enabled pupils to develop wide-ranging musical skills. The recent mini-enterprise organised by P7 had been very successful and had effectively extended their awareness of the wider world. Pupils' achievements both in and out of school were extensively celebrated in displays throughout the school and in newsletters to parents. P6 contributed informative and well-written articles regularly to the schools' page in a local newspaper.

##### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Standards in reading and writing had improved steadily from 2000 to 2002 but had dipped slightly in writing in 2003. Pupils' performance in their coursework was consistently good and sometimes very good. Most pupils at each stage achieved national levels of attainment in English language. Almost all pupils spoke clearly and confidently and listened well to instructions and

information. They often replied to their teachers' questions with extended and thoughtful answers. Pupils' skills in presenting formal, structured oral reports to their classmates required improvement. From the early stages, pupils demonstrated good research skills. Their written reports on the information they had found were extended and detailed. At P7, pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes and some pieces were of very good quality.

## **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good and was improving. Standards in mathematics had been consistently good over the last three years. Almost all pupils were achieving or exceeding national levels of attainment in most aspects of mathematics. For a few pupils the pace of work had not been appropriate and their knowledge of work covered was not fully secure. Pupils were confident in using and interpreting a range of graphs. Throughout the school pupils performed well in mental and written calculations. In the upper stages pupils had a good understanding of the properties of shapes. There were weaknesses in pupils' problem-solving and enquiry skills. Too many lacked confidence in reporting on how they tackled problems and in applying a suitably wide range of strategies.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The school had very good arrangements to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils. Staff knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to their individual circumstances and to any difficulties they faced. Pupils had a very good understanding of the school's clear rules for behaviour in the playground and dining hall. They knew how to make a complaint and were confident that their concerns would be dealt with. The headteacher and staff dealt effectively with any incidents of bullying or bad behaviour which occurred. The health education programme was very effective in meeting the emotional, physical and social needs of individual pupils. Many responded very well to the school's strong promotion of healthy lifestyles as part of the health education programme. The school's programme for personal and social development successfully promoted the development of positive attitudes to learning.

Support for learning teachers effectively implemented very good programmes for pupils with special educational needs. These included an innovative programme for pupils with movement difficulties. Class teachers gave good support to individual pupils. In the early stages, staff did not always provide tasks which met higher attaining pupils' learning needs effectively. At all stages, classroom assistants and auxiliaries supported pupils' learning well. The school had drawn up very good quality individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for those pupils with Records of Needs and other identified additional support needs. Educational psychologists, social workers and other health professionals provided strong support to individual pupils with social and emotional difficulties through working as a multi-agency team. The school also closely involved parents in supporting their children's learning through advice and guidance on homework and detailed booklets on aspects of the curriculum. Arrangements to support pupils transferring from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school were very good.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation was fair. Many classrooms were small and cramped and this restricted staff in their approaches to learning and teaching. External steps and pathways were in poor condition and presented potential hazards. Much of the building was not accessible to disabled users. Security arrangements were effective. Adults expressed concerns about the quality of lighting and ventilation in a number of classrooms. In view of staff concerns, the authority required to carry out a risk assessment of the lighting systems in the school.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a very friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Staff and pupils were proud to belong to the school and their morale was high. Relationships at all levels were very good with very strong teamwork amongst all staff. Praise was used well to reward the achievements of both staff and pupils. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour but on occasion did not provide sufficiently challenging tasks for pupils. The headteacher was very successful in ensuring that both teaching and support staff were fully involved in promoting an ethos of equality, fairness and respect for others. Pupils had very good opportunities for religious observance and to participate in worship. Almost all pupils were courteous to each other and to adults.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had a very strong partnership with parents, carers and the School Board. The School Board and the association of friends of Muirtown Primary School contributed extensively to improving numerous aspects of the school's provision. Informative reports on pupils' progress, and frequent well-written newsletters, ensured good communication between school and home. Parents were encouraged to visit the school and give their views on the school's work. There were very good links with local businesses, retirement homes and a local newspaper.</p>

## 7. Improving the school

The headteacher and staff had made an effective start to improving pupils' achievement and attainment. Staff knew their pupils very well and showed care and concern for their well-being. The range of activities available to pupils both during and after the school day successfully promoted their personal and social development. The school had effectively ensured that standards of attainment in mathematics and reading had continuously improved. In writing, standards had varied from year to year. The quality of learning and teaching was good overall but the pace of learning was too slow at some stages.

In her short time in post, the headteacher had provided good leadership and had earned the respect and loyalty of staff, pupils and parents. She had put in place a number of important improvements in programmes of study, and had made significant changes to the structure and balance of the curriculum. Working with staff, she had developed a clear vision for the school's future and had begun to encourage a wider range of approaches to learning and teaching. The deputy head teacher fulfilled her remit well. She supported staff effectively and had had a positive impact on pupils' experiences.

Arrangements for quality assurance were good and improving. Senior promoted staff discussed and monitored teachers' forward plans on a regular basis. They sampled pupils' work and had started to analyse assessment information to track pupils' progress effectively and predict their future levels of attainment. Senior promoted staff visited classes regularly to monitor reading and writing. They had not yet used these visits to evaluate wider aspects of learning and teaching to ensure that all pupils' needs were being met. The programme of staff review and development effectively supported improvement. All staff had been involved in compiling a very good school improvement plan which focused closely on children's needs. As a result of the improvements instigated by the headteacher and senior staff the school was well placed to develop further.

The school and education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the work of the school and to raise achievement for all its pupils. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- improve pace and challenge in the early stages;
- ensure that tasks and activities meet the needs of all pupils including higher attaining pupils; and
- attend to the health and safety aspects identified in this report and conduct a risk assessment relating to the school's lighting system.

### **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

27 April 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

### **We judged the following to be very good**

- Structure of the curriculum
- Pastoral care
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

### **We judged the following to be good**

- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experience
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

### **We judged the following to be fair**

- Accommodation and facilities

### **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.

<b>What pleased parents and carers most</b>	<b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of the school's work.</li> <li>• The major improvements introduced by the headteacher.</li> <li>• The excellent leadership in the school.</li> <li>• The range and quality of information provided by the school.</li> <li>• The welcome they were given in the school and its responsiveness to their queries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access routes to the school for all users including the disabled.</li> <li>• The maintenance of the school building, external steps and the perimeter fence.</li> </ul>
<b>What pleased pupils most</b>	<b>What pupils would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling that the school was safe and friendly.</li> <li>• The improvements the headteacher had put in place.</li> <li>• The opportunities to have a say in improving the school.</li> <li>• The quality of the school meals.</li> <li>• Helpful and supportive teachers.</li> <li>• Being praised for good work and having their successes celebrated.</li> <li>• Having effective anti-bullying procedures in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better toilets for girls.</li> <li>• Crowded cloakrooms.</li> </ul>

<b>What pleased staff most</b>	<b>What staff would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements in climate and relationships and morale in the last year.</li> <li>• The headteacher's open and responsive style of management.</li> <li>• The sense of a strong atmosphere of teamwork.</li> <li>• The practical advice and guidance from the headteacher.</li> <li>• The range of pupils' achievements and the support of parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of lighting and ventilation in the school.</li> </ul>

## **How can you contact us?**

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, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Professor Alice Brown  
The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman  
23 Walker Street  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7HX

Telephone number: 0870 011 5378  
e-mail: [enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk)

More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website:  
[www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)

Crown Copyright 2004

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.