

**Millbank Primary School
and Nursery Class
Nairn
The Highland Council
3 June 2008**

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1. Background

Millbank Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in February 2008 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents¹.

The school serves an area of the town of Nairn. At the time of the inspection the roll, including the nursery, the support base and the Gaelic medium class was 325. There were four children in the support base, which catered for pupils within and outwith the school's catchment area, with a wide range of significant additional support needs. There were 35 children in the nursery class and nine pupils in the Gaelic-medium class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

Evaluations in this report, except where otherwise indicated, apply equally to the Gaelic-medium and English-medium classes.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Very good progress made by children in the nursery and pupils in the Gaelic-medium class.
- Teachers' effective use of drama to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum.
- The school's approaches to developing pupils' wider achievements.
- Staff's arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils.
- Successful engagement of parents in their children's learning.

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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

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

Parents were pleased with almost all aspects of the school. Parents of children in the nursery thought their children were happy and were having very good early learning experiences. Across the primary classes, parents thought that their children enjoyed being at school and found school work stimulating and challenging. Parents felt welcome in the school and found parents' evenings helpful and informative. They thought that the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. Pupils enjoyed being at school. They liked their teachers, thought they were well taught and were expected to work hard. More than a quarter reported that the behaviour of other pupils could be improved. A significant minority of pupils felt that pupils were not always dealt with fairly in the school. Teaching and support staff were very positive in their responses. All reported that they liked working in the school and felt that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

At the primary stages, the structure and quality of the curriculum was good. Teachers ensured that pupils were provided with a broad and balanced educational experience which offered good opportunities for progression. Staff regularly reviewed and improved programmes of study. Nursery children experienced a broad and balanced curriculum. Staff offered a very good variety of opportunities for children to learn through play. Children enjoyed their activities and engaged well in tasks, for instance when using the computer, drawing pictures or playing with a programmable toy. At the primary stages, staff had improved the reading programme and this had made a positive impact on pupils' attainment. Staff placed an appropriate emphasis on health promotion and pupils were actively encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. Teachers made very effective use of drama to motivate and engage pupils and to develop a range of key skills. All pupils benefited from two hours of physical education each week, in line with national recommendations. In the support base, the curriculum was good. Pupils with more complex needs did not have sufficient opportunities to access integrated sensory experiences or use appropriate technology to support their learning. Across the school, the overall quality of teaching was good. Staff in the nursery class had developed positive relationships with the children and used praise well to celebrate children's achievements and raise their self-esteem. Nursery staff interacted very effectively to support and extend children's learning. At the primary stages, teachers effectively shared with pupils what they were to learn and gave clear explanations and instructions. Activities were planned well to help pupils develop key skills in meaningful and stimulating contexts. Standards of teaching were not consistently high in all classes. In a few lessons, teachers directed lessons too much and pupils' behaviour was not always managed effectively. Staff set pupils an appropriate variety of homework tasks to support the learning taking place in school.

Children in the nursery class were investigating and exploring the world around them both indoors and in the nursery garden. They were learning about Scotland and other countries such as Sweden and China. They demonstrated appropriate skills using a range of information and communications technology (ICT). In their expressive and aesthetic development, children made very good use of musical instruments. They became absorbed in role play in the well-organised class airport. Children were developing good finger control and cutting skills. Staff provided too few opportunities for physical play indoors. In the primary classes, most pupils were enthusiastic and well-motivated learners. Teachers provided good opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively. Pupils showed good independence in learning and were keen to participate in class discussions. Overall, they interacted well together when working in groups, although they were not always skilled listening to each other's ideas and contributions. A significant minority of pupils did not cooperate well with teachers and this disrupted their own learning and that of others.

The school had taken good steps to develop pupils' broader achievements. Children in the nursery class were developing a very good understanding of social rules. They were confident, independent and secure. Across the primary stages, pupils were making very good progress in developing their confidence and self-esteem. They had very good opportunities to contribute their views through the active school council. Senior pupils developed personal and social skills through buddying and caring for younger pupils. All pupils had a good understanding of health issues such as personal safety and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The school had achieved recognition as a Health Promoting School. Pupils at all stages had taken part in school concerts for the whole community and were active in fundraising for charity. Pupils' achievements in the community were effectively valued and celebrated in the school and in a regular school publication, *Millbank Moments*. Through their involvement in a number of school initiatives, including recycling waste materials, all pupils were encouraged to care for their school environment. Pupil cooperation and teamwork were strong features of enterprise education and eco-schools activities.

English language

Children in the nursery class were making very good progress in the development of communication and language skills. They talked confidently to adults and each other. Children were developing an appropriate interest in books and stories in the nursery and at home. All children were beginning to write by making marks and a few accurately wrote words during play situations. At the primary stages, the quality of attainment in English language was good. In reading, writing, listening and talking, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment and pupils with additional support needs were making good progress in their coursework. Levels of attainment in reading and writing were improving. The school did not systematically monitor or record pupils' attainment in listening and talking. At all stages pupils listened well to one another. In a few classes, pupils did not listen well enough to the teacher and this affected their ability to work appropriately. Almost all pupils talked confidently to each other and to adults. At the upper stages most pupils were able to take a role and offer opinions. In reading, most pupils were making good progress and at the early and upper stages a majority were attaining appropriate national levels earlier than might normally be expected. For a few pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Pupils at the early stages were making a good start with their reading skills. Most pupils at the upper stages enjoyed reading and could speak knowledgeably about their favourite authors. Almost all at the early stages and most

at the middle stages were achieving appropriate levels in writing. At the upper stages, too many pupils were not attaining national levels in writing. At all stages, pupils did not consistently plan and redraft their work with sufficient care to ensure consistently high standards of content and presentation.

Gaelic language

The overall quality of attainment in Gaelic language was very good. Almost all pupils exceeded appropriate national levels of attainment in reading, writing, listening and talking. At the early stages, almost all pupils made very good progress in the acquisition of Gaelic language. Pupils listened well for information and responded appropriately to the class teacher. Pupils in P2 and P3 expressed their views clearly and spoke confidently to adults and each other about a range of topics. At P2 and P3, pupils read aloud with growing independence, understanding and skill in word recognition. These pupils displayed very good knowledge about language and wrote appropriately for a variety of purposes.

Mathematics

In the nursery class, children were making very good progress in mathematical learning. They recognised numbers, colours and shapes in the environment. They were exploring measurement and weighed natural objects using scales. They investigated well and confidently counted objects during play. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good and improving. Most pupils had achieved appropriate levels of attainment. An increasing number of pupils attained national levels earlier than might normally be expected. Most pupils, including pupils with additional support needs, were making good progress in their coursework. At all stages, pupils could interpret graphs well, and used various types of graphs effectively to organise and display information. By P7, most pupils had a confident grasp of key areas of number, money and measurement. Across the school, pupils' skills in mental calculation were well developed, but a few pupils were not sufficiently quick in giving correct responses. Pupils could accurately identify an appropriate range of shapes and their properties. Throughout the school, a positive start had been made to developing pupils' problem-solving and enquiry skills. Pupils' ability to select, discuss and apply a range of problem solving strategies were not well developed. Too many pupils did not set down solutions in a clear and logical fashion.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Across the school, arrangements to meet the needs of all pupils were good. In the nursery class, staff provided very good support for individual children. They made regular, focused observations and used information effectively when planning children's learning. They worked closely with colleagues to support individual children's needs. In the primary classes, learning activities and teaching approaches were suitably matched to pupils' different needs. Staff often took effective steps, such as grouping pupils by levels of attainment, to meet the differing needs of pupils in their classes. At all stages, teachers set learning targets for pupils and involved them well in their personal learning planning. Staff had established effective systems for identifying pupils who needed additional support with their learning. Staff collaborated well to devise individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils. In a few cases, the learning targets in IEPs were not sufficiently precise to help staff and parents measure progress. Good links with a range of outside agencies helped staff support pupils and

meet their varied needs. Support for learning teachers and classroom assistants provided well-judged support for individuals and groups. The school had established well-planned and effective induction programmes for pupils entering P1, and for P7 pupils transferring to Nairn Academy.

Staff within the support base identified children’s needs effectively and tasks and activities were well matched to pupils’ individual needs. The pace of learning was well managed. Pupils were progressing well towards the learning targets set for them in their IEPs. Pupils in the support base had developed some independence in learning by participating in setting and reviewing their own learning targets. Individual visual timetables were helping pupils to become more independent in their learning. Speech and language therapists worked effectively with teachers and classroom support staff to ensure that pupils’ language skills were being appropriately developed. A few pupils attended mainstream classes for a range of curricular experiences, including science and environmental studies. Staff planned together well to ensure that pupils were benefiting from these experiences. There were insufficient opportunities across the school for all pupils in the base to be engaged with their mainstream peers.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The quality of pastoral care was very good. Nursery staff provided very good care to children and were aware of their responsibilities for ensuring children’s safety and welfare. At the primary stages, all staff placed a high priority on pupils’ care and welfare and were very responsive to their needs. They knew pupils well and had developed very positive relationships with them. Pupils could describe the school’s procedures for dealing with bullying. They were able to discuss matters with the approachable headteacher or with any member of staff. A complaints box was in place for pupils who wanted to highlight any confidential matters. The school’s procedures for dealing with child protection issues and for managing incidents of bullying and racism were appropriate, understood by staff and effectively implemented. Senior pupils served as buddies to younger pupils and these arrangements worked well to support all pupils. A children’s service worker liaised effectively with staff and parents to offer helpful support to potentially vulnerable pupils.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Management and use of resources and space for learning</p>	<p>The quality of the accommodation was adequate. Staff made effective use of all available space. The quality of display was of a high standard and provided a stimulating and attractive learning environment for pupils. Pupils benefited from a number of features, including an ICT suite and spacious outdoor areas. Overall, building security arrangements were appropriate. Access into and within the school building was not suitable for those with restricted mobility. In the support base, the space for learning and the range of needs within the group restricted opportunities for pupils to work directly with their teacher. There was no appropriate sensory facility or time-out area. There were insufficient resources available to fully meet the diverse range of pupils' needs within the base. Aspects of the fabric and décor of the school building were in need of improvement, including, for example, the staff room area and toilets.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness</p>	<p>The school had a warm and positive ethos. Staff and pupils demonstrated a strong sense of pride in the school. All staff were meaningfully involved in helping the school to improve. Staff did not yet share a clear understanding of what was required to provide a consistently high quality education for pupils. Staff's expectations of pupils' behaviour were not always sufficiently high. Staff did not always deal consistently with all pupils. Weekly assemblies provided good opportunities for the celebration of pupils' achievements and for religious observance. All staff promoted racial, cultural and religious diversity through the curriculum and in the day-to-day life of the school. Senior pupils responded well to a wide range of opportunities involving responsibility and support for younger pupils. Regular classwork and well-planned opportunities for pupils to support peers, including, for example, a paired reading project, helped pupils develop a sense of equality, fairness and tolerance.</p>

Aspect	Comment
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	Parents were committed to, and actively involved in, the life of the school. They served on the Parent Council, helped in classes, contributed to development groups and raised funds for the school. Parents were successfully involved in their children's learning, including, for example, through regular access to pupils' personal learning planning. Staff consulted appropriately with parents about a range of issues, including the helpfulness of open events and the teaching of sensitive health issues. Parents were kept well informed about the work of the school through useful summaries regarding future school priorities. They knew how to raise concerns with the school and were confident that the school would act on these. Parents valued the opportunities they had to discuss their children's progress, both at formal parents' evenings and informally throughout the year. Staff made effective use of partnerships with the local community to enhance pupils' experiences. These partnerships included strong links with local cluster schools, businesses and churches. The nursery had helpful and well established links with the neighbouring pre-school centre.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Millbank Primary School provided an effective and improving education for its pupils. At the primary stages, pupils' attainment was good in mathematics and English language. In the Gaelic medium class, pupils were making very good progress in their learning. Staff had improved the curriculum and used a greater range of stimulating, interactive learning opportunities. This had raised pupils' attainment over recent years. In order to maintain this pace of progress, staff needed to manage pupils' behaviour more consistently and effectively. Staff and pupils' morale was high. Everyone in the school community was strongly committed to its work, valued one another and cooperated very well.

Under the good leadership of the headteacher, the school had demonstrated a capacity to continuously improve the quality of its work. The headteacher set a clear strategic direction and communicated very effectively with the school community. She had succeeded in establishing a very positive climate across the school and had developed effective teamwork and partnerships across the school. The headteacher was ably supported by the depute headteacher and two principal teachers. The depute headteacher and principal teachers made a significant contribution to the management of the school through their roles as curriculum leaders and specialists in pupil support. There were well established arrangements in place to review the work of the school. Parents, pupils and staff were consulted and their views had led to improvements.

Promoted staff monitored teachers' plans, sampled pupils' work and observed lessons. Working closely with teachers, the headteacher tracked pupils' progress and learning targets to inform pupils' next steps in learning. She had not yet used the information arising from self-evaluation procedures to work with staff and ensure a consistently high quality of learning and teaching.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no recommendations and no requirements.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve learning and teaching. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve the accommodation and facilities in the support base and address weaknesses in the wider school accommodation, as identified in this report;
- develop more consistent and effective approaches to managing pupils' behaviour; and
- continue to improve pupils' attainment in writing.

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. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Peter Carpenter
HM Inspector

3 June 2008

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
The curriculum	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Learners' experiences	good
Improvement in performance: English language	good
Improvement in performance: Gaelic language	very good
Improvement in performance: mathematics	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	adequate
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	good
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • Staff showed care and concern for their children. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve aspects of the accommodation. • Give a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement. • Manage poor behaviour more effectively.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained tasks clearly. • School was enjoyable and helped them keep safe and healthy. • Teachers told pupils how they were getting on with their work. • Teachers told pupils when they did well and checked their homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the behaviour of some pupils. • A fifth of pupils felt that the school could deal more effectively with bullying. • Ensure that all pupils are treated fairly.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regular celebration of pupils' successes. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • All staff liked working in the school and felt that the school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage pupil behaviour more effectively and consistently.

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, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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