

**Dyke Primary School
By Forres
The Moray Council
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1. Background

Dyke Primary School was inspected in December 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 groups of pupils and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents.

The school serves the village of Dyke and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 83. 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.

- Dedicated and highly committed staff.
- Partnership with parents and positive staff-pupil relationships.
- Care and concern shown to pupils with additional support needs.
- Aspects of learning and teaching.
- The vision and commitment of the new headteacher to improving the school.

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

HM Inspectors assessed the school's processes for self evaluation. They 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.

Parents, carers and staff were very positive about the school. They felt that it was well led and that the new headteacher and his staff were supportive and approachable. Parents and carers appreciated the school's prompt and effective responses to their enquiries. They felt that it had a good reputation in the community and that they were made welcome in the school. Parents thought that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils and that if they had a concern the school would take action. Pupils felt that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy and that they were well taught.

All teachers liked working in the school and felt that the pupils were enthusiastic about learning.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided a broad and balanced curriculum. However, pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to use information and communications technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. Music, technology and health education required additional attention. Time allocations, however, between the different elements of the curriculum required review. In many lessons good questioning helped to reinforce and extend learning. Teachers' explanations were detailed and clear. There were numerous instances of direct teaching linked to very good use of praise. All staff paid good attention to pupils' responses and all used an appropriate range of teaching techniques. In several classes, teachers met pupils' needs well through provision of a range of differentiated tasks. However, most teachers did not make sufficient use of information gained from assessment to plan for next steps in learning or to target weaknesses in pupils' understanding. Some teachers did not use homework sufficiently well to supplement class learning and challenge pupils.

Pupils were encouraged to think for themselves and as a result produced innovative solutions to problems. In most lessons, pupils worked quietly and purposefully and listened carefully to teachers' explanations and instructions. However, a few at P3-P7 were not clear on what they had to learn or what they needed to do to improve their work. On occasion pupils would have benefited from being taught in larger groups to ensure a faster pace of work. Pupils in P4-P7 had good skill in researching and presenting information. At all stages pupils demonstrated mature and sensible approaches to their work.

Pupils participated in a wide range of visits to places of historical and educational interest such as Culloden battlefield and a local recycling centre. Most pupils from P1 onwards attended the Saturday morning football coaching run by parents. Pupils enthusiastically prepared for the school's Christmas concert and showed good skills in singing and dancing. Senior pupils ran successful enterprise activities, including the school tuck-shop and a school newspaper. Inter-house competitions were keenly contested and, along with the school's system of awarding house points for good work, helped to motivate pupils.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Standards in reading had improved steadily over the last three years but had declined in writing to just below the national average. However, many pupils were exceeding national expectations of attainment in reading and writing. All pupils at P1 to P3 had attained appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. At P4 to P7, most had attained these levels in reading, listening and talking and the majority in writing. Almost all pupils listened attentively in class and responded positively and appropriately to teachers' questions. Pupils at P6/P7 showed very good skill in addressing their peers

when delivering oral reports. At all stages, pupils read widely for pleasure and most were skilled in reading for information. They had a good appreciation of how an author could use particular words for effect. From P2 onwards pupils wrote for a range of purposes including expressive acrostic poems on an autumn theme and clear reports of investigations in science. By P7, pupils' knowledge about language was very well developed and was well reflected in their written work.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. In recent years attainment had remained steady. Most pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. At P1 and P2, most pupils achieved these levels early. At most stages, pupils were making steady progress through their course work. The majority of pupils were able to carry out mental and written calculations accurately. Most pupils had a good knowledge of shape and were able to organise and interpret information. Pupils had limited skills in using computerised databases and spreadsheets. Almost all pupils had a good knowledge of problem solving strategies and were beginning to use these strategies in their work.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff knew their pupils very well and showed care and concern for them as individuals. They were very sensitive to pupils' emotional, social and physical needs. The school had established a health committee and junior road safety officers had been appointed. Pupils did not have access to a complaints procedure but the school had clear plans to establish a pupil council. No member of the teaching staff had been trained in child protection or anti-racism. Support staff had all been trained in child protection. There were no trained first aiders in the school.

The headteacher provided very effective support for learning for pupils who were encountering difficulty in their learning. He maintained detailed records and planned the learning of pupils with additional support needs thoroughly. He worked closely with class teachers and consulted and planned regularly with them. He made very good use of ICT to support and reinforce pupils' learning. Staff made very effective use of individualised educational programmes to support pupils with additional support needs. These programmes set clear and specific learning targets through which most pupils were progressing well. Records of Needs were maintained appropriately. Pupils at all stages were very well supported by their class teachers when they experienced difficulty. Classroom assistants provided very effective help to pupils and teachers. The school effectively ensured that vulnerable pupils were very well supported and their social and emotional needs appropriately catered for.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The school was on a split site. The school hall and dining facilities were located across the main road which ran through the village. Groups of pupils crossed from one building to the other at frequent intervals. Although these groups were well supervised by staff, passing traffic presented potential dangers. The fabric of the school was in good condition. The building was, however, cramped and lacked many facilities. Aspects of security required review. The extensive playing fields were well used by pupils for free play and team games. A number of health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the school.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and pupils were very proud of the school. Pupil and staff morale was high. Relationships among and between staff and pupils were very positive. Reception was well organised and welcoming. Praise was used well throughout the school, but staff should expect high attainment more consistently. Pupils responded very well to the high standards of behaviour and discipline set by staff. The system of teacher awards, monthly certificates, and the recognition of sporting success helped to celebrate pupils' achievements. However, pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to exercise responsibility or have a say in improving the school. Equality and fairness were strongly promoted. Pupils appreciated the value of learning from different cultures and countries. There were regular opportunities for religious observance.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school's partnership with parents and the community had major strengths. Parents were extensively involved in extra-curricular activities and voluntarily helped with the work of the school. The School Board and the PTA actively supported the school through fundraising and other activities. There were good links with the village pre-school centre and with Forres Academy through joint working in the area support group for schools. Reports to parents were detailed, although comments selected by teachers from a menu of pre-prepared statements were not always clear.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

Dyke Primary School provided a good and improving standard of education within a caring and supportive ethos. There was mutual respect between staff and pupils and learning and teaching was of good quality. Many pupils attained highly but more could have been asked of higher attaining pupils. The school did not have a fully robust system for tracking and predicting pupils' attainments. The system for monitoring pupils' progress required review to ensure that the good work achieved by staff and pupils was appropriately recorded and acknowledged.

The headteacher had been in post for four months. In that time he had made a very good start to taking the school forward. He had improved a number of safety issues related to the road crossing and the provision of furniture, and resources for mathematics, English language and ICT. He had quickly established positive relationships with staff, pupils, parents and the School Board. He had clearly identified the weaknesses in attainment and had begun to take effective action to address them. He had also enabled teaching staff to attend appropriate training courses and introduced improvements in self-evaluation such as consulting staff about improvement priorities and using national quality indicators more effectively. He had effectively communicated his vision for the school's further development to staff, pupils, parents and the wider community.

Prior to the headteacher's appointment, no member of staff had had their work reviewed or had been adequately consulted about school improvement. Approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance were fair. Overall, the education authority had not previously engaged sufficiently with the school to ensure continuous improvement in its work. However, in recent months the authority had provided good and improving support to the school.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve attainment in English language and mathematics. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- ensure that higher attaining pupils are fully challenged;
- establish a system for tracking, monitoring and predicting pupils' attainment;
- develop a robust system of quality assurance and self-evaluation; and
- ensure staff receive appropriate training in child protection and anti-racism and that health and safety issues are addressed.

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

22 March 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Leadership

We judged the following to be fair

- Accommodation and facilities
- Self-evaluation

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.

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children enjoyed being at school and found work stimulating and challenging. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • School buildings were kept in good order. • The school's very friendly atmosphere and helpful and approachable staff. • The progress that pupils made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The format of the revised reports on pupils' progress.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers listened, helped, explained things clearly and acknowledged their achievements. • They felt safe in the school. • The opportunities provided to use computers and play sport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils had no significant concerns.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The positive school atmosphere and mutually supportive staff. • The supportive and approachable leadership style and the vision and commitment of the new headteacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff 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 Educational Services, 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.co.uk.

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