

**New Elgin Primary School
The Moray Council
21 June 2005**

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1. Background

New Elgin Primary School was inspected in March 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, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents.

The school serves an area to the south of the Royal Burgh of Elgin. At the time of the inspection the roll was 329, including 35 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

The nursery class was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Climate and relationships, including staff commitment and pupil behaviour.
- Provision for pupils' care and welfare.
- The quality of the internal environment.
- The drive to improve learning and teaching.
- The leadership initiatives of the new headteacher.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, 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.

In general, parents were very satisfied with the work of the school. They thought staff set high standards of work and behaviour, looked after pupils well and communicated effectively with parents. A few had individual concerns about their own children or about the school's reputation in the community. Almost all pupils enjoyed school and

thought that staff gave them good support, listened to them and treated them fairly. Some thought that the behaviour of pupils could be better but almost all felt that they personally got on well with others. All staff liked working in the school. They thought it set high standards and was well led, and that pupils were enthusiastic. Some non-teaching staff felt communications and opportunities for involvement in decision making could be better.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school offered an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum, covering all key areas. These included a systematic programme in information and communications technology (ICT) at all stages, and the regular promotion of the values of citizenship. Within mathematics, pupils' learning was not always developed systematically enough. The quality of teaching was good overall, with some examples of very good practice. Teachers had recently adopted new techniques to give lessons a better structure. These techniques were being implemented more successfully in some classes than in others. The best examples were where teachers shared learning objectives with pupils, reinforced them throughout and provided a well-paced variety of learning activities. Homework was set regularly and was generally appropriate to pupils' needs. Teachers generally gave appropriate feedback to pupils on their work but some pupils were presented for national assessments before they were ready.

Pupils generally worked well in class. They were well motivated and attentive. Despite recent interruptions to the continuity of relationships in two classes, owing to staff illness and departures, pupils continued to work in a settled manner. Pupils were most enthusiastic about learning where they were involved in practical activities and had opportunities to work in collaboration with others. In lessons where clear targets were set, most pupils were able to work independently. In a few lessons, content and pace were not sufficiently stimulating.

Across all stages, pupils showed appropriate skills in the use of ICT to enhance their work. These skills included word processing, finding information, creative art and making presentations. In their personal and social development, pupils were making good progress in developing respect for self and others. Sound programmes of physical education and health promotion made pupils aware of the importance of nutrition and exercise. In a few classes there were specific opportunities to set personal targets and develop skills of collaborative learning. Overall, the school was successfully promoting national priorities in education concerned with values and citizenship.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Standards of attainment over the last three years showed an improving trend. Most pupils were achieving or exceeding appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking and reading. A majority were achieving these levels in writing. Pupils who were not yet attaining expected levels in the various aspects were nevertheless making steady progress in their coursework. At all stages, a significant number of pupils achieved

levels earlier than might normally be expected, although this was less marked in the upper stages. In P7, just over half of pupils were achieving expected levels in writing. Overall, pupils listened well in class, to teachers and to one another, and P7 pupils showed the ability to listen and take account of the views of others in group discussion. Pupils spoke confidently about their work and interests. In the early stages overall, pupils made good progress in reading and writing, although some were capable of making a quicker start in P1. Older pupils showed appropriate skills in reading and comprehension but some fiction texts used in P6 classes were insufficiently challenging. Better non-fiction resources were needed to develop skills in reading for information from P5 onwards. There were some very good examples of pupils' writing where individual work had followed structured class preparation and discussion. However, a significant minority of pupils at P6 and P7 had difficulties in expressing themselves confidently and accurately in writing.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was fair. Standards had been maintained but had not improved in recent years. All pupils at P3 were achieving expected national levels of attainment, but only a majority at P4, P6 and P7 were doing so. At the early stages, insufficient account was taken of pupils' prior knowledge and abilities in planning their learning. As a result the more able pupils were not being suitably challenged. At the middle stages, despite the good support being given to pupils who were having difficulty with basic concepts, overall too few pupils were attaining expected levels. By the upper stages, a small number of pupils were exceeding these levels but many were still failing to reach them. All pupils could draw and interpret graphs at levels appropriate to their ages. Across the stages, most pupils could carry out written calculations quickly but some were unsure of basic number bonds. At the middle stages children were not consistently measuring accurately. Most pupils had good knowledge about the features of shapes. A progressive approach to problem solving was beginning to equip pupils with a range of strategies to solve problems. However, pupils at the upper stages were not yet confident in choosing or discussing appropriate strategies.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff had a good knowledge of pupils and their backgrounds and were alert to pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. Appropriate policies were in place on child protection and anti-bullying. Support staff had recently completed training in child protection and further training for teachers was under way. Special provision had been made for the personal and social needs of vulnerable pupils through after school support groups run by community development workers. Almost all pupils agreed that teachers knew them well and that they felt safe and well looked after.

Most teachers organised classwork effectively to meet the range of pupils' needs but in a few cases work set did not match pupils' previous attainments. Support staff provided valuable help for pupils in class but lacked sufficient opportunity to plan with teachers to make best use of their time. The school had experienced some staffing difficulties in relation to support for learning which had resulted in a temporary reduction of provision for the wide range of pupils with additional support needs. Support for learning staff provided very good support in basic literacy skills for individuals and groups of pupils who required

additional help. Together with class teachers they had developed appropriate individualised educational programmes for specific pupils which were reviewed regularly. However, there were some weaknesses in the school's record keeping for vulnerable pupils, including those with a Record of Needs. Liaison with other agencies including psychological services required better coordination.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Overall, the quality of accommodation was good. Internally, it presented a bright, attractive and stimulating environment for learning. Good use had been made of surplus space to improve facilities for ICT, support for learning and the school library. The school was well maintained. The quality of display in classrooms and open areas was high. However, toilets required some refurbishment. Pupils benefited from access to a spacious playground, including grass and tarmac surfaces. Tarmac areas were split-level and presented a safety risk. Building security measures were appropriate. Pupil safety in the playground had been improved by restricting the use of the car park.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	The school had a very positive ethos. Staff morale was high, pupil behaviour was very good and relationships were based on mutual respect. Pupils' achievements, both in and out of school, were recognised through praise and award systems. Frequent assemblies provided opportunities for sharing achievements as well as for religious observance. Staff had high expectations of pupils and there was a renewed focus on improving attainment. Pupils responded enthusiastically to opportunities to exercise responsibility as house captains, members of the pupil council and 'buddies'. They also showed concern for the needs of others, both locally and in the wider world, through enterprise and charity activities. A sense of equality and fairness was promoted within the school but there was scope for giving more attention to issues of race equality within environmental studies.

Partnership with parents and the community	The school had good links with parents and the community. Communications with parents included regular newsletters and information about the curriculum, homework and the policy on behaviour, as well as their own children's progress. However, parents were not currently given sufficient information about the approach to sensitive issues, such as substance abuse and personal relationships, in the health education programme. The PTA provided good support for the school through social and fund-raising activities. The School Board took a keen interest in the running of the school and had played a major part in the appointment of the new headteacher. A few parents provided valuable help with school clubs and activities but parental involvement in pupils' learning was limited. There were good links with other schools, particularly with regard to the transition of pupils from P7 to S1. There were also growing links with community development workers and the headteacher had ambitious plans for more community involvement in the school.
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7. Improving the school

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

New Elgin Primary School was an improving school, with a strong commitment to standards of social behaviour and a renewed emphasis on improving learning, teaching and attainment. A good mixture of experienced and newer staff had set about improving the structure of lessons and meeting the needs of all pupils. Attainment was improving in some aspects of English language, but there was still some way to go in raising attainment in writing and in mathematics. Pupils' wider achievements were recognised and pupils showed growing self-esteem and willingness to learn. There was good provision for pupils with additional support needs and a high level of pastoral care for all. The school was working hard to implement the national priorities for education with regard to achievement, a better framework for learning, values and citizenship.

Staff were very involved in improvement through the annual audit and development planning procedures. The headteacher had been in post for only four months, but had already made a significant impact on improving learning and teaching, pupil behaviour and the quality of the learning environment. She had vision, enthusiasm and a high degree of professional commitment. She was ably assisted by the deputy headteacher, who made a sound contribution to relationships with staff, pupils and parents. There were appropriate systems in place for monitoring teachers' plans, learning and teaching in the classroom and pupils' standards of work. The headteacher had begun to devise a database of information about pupils' attainment and potential. This now needed to be carried through quickly so that teachers could make best use of assessment information

to track pupils' progress, set individual targets and provide appropriate support and challenge for all. Overall, the school was well placed to carry out future improvements.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve pupils' achievements, learning and teaching, and meeting the needs of all pupils. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- raise attainment in writing and mathematics;
- continue to improve learning and teaching consistently across classes;
- make better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and meet the needs of all.

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.

Allan Hawke
HM Inspector

21 June 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Accommodation and facilities
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be fair

- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs

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.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed school and found school work stimulating and challenging. • The school was responsive to parents' concerns and kept them informed about matters such as homework and their children's progress. • Staff showed concern for children's care and welfare. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils and the school dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents remarked on the school's poor reputation in the community, which they thought was undeserved. • Some parents would like more time to consult teachers at parents' evenings.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly, helped them with difficulties and praised them for achievement. • Pupils were treated fairly and got on well together. • Pupils had a say in making the school better. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some thought the behaviour of pupils could be better.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's relationships with the local community. • Provision for pupils' care and welfare. • Pupils' enthusiasm for learning. • Standards set for pupils' behaviour. • School leadership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some support staff thought that communications and opportunities to be involved in decision making could be better.

How can you contact us?

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