

**Milne's Primary School
Fochabers
Moray Council
21 June 2005**

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1. Background

Milne's 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, a representative of the parent-teacher association (PTA), members of the wider school community and a group of parents.

The school serves the town of Fochabers and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 257, including 32 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.

- The broad and balanced curriculum and the well-planned programmes of work in almost all curricular areas.
- High standards of teaching.
- Strong partnerships with parents and the local community and in particular the very supportive PTA.
- Approaches to monitoring pupils' progress and taking action, including the effective contribution of support for learning staff, to meet the learning needs of almost all pupils.
- Procedures for self-evaluation and the commitment of all staff to continuous improvement.

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

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

Parents and carers were pleased with most aspects of the school's provision. In particular, they felt that staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children and that the school buildings were kept in good order. A few of those who responded felt the school did not deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour. A few felt that teachers did not provide enough information on their children's strengths and weaknesses. Almost all pupils enjoyed school. They felt strongly that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. A quarter of them did not think that the behaviour of pupils was good. However, after discussion with pupils and observation of them in classes and at play, no significant cause for concern was identified. Teachers and support staff expressed very positive views about the school. All felt that they worked hard to maintain good relations with the local community and that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was of very good quality overall. It provided pupils at all stages with well-planned, progressive opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding and to develop key skills. The headteacher ensured very good breadth and balance by providing clear advice to teachers on the times to be allocated to key areas of learning. Teachers made effective links between different curricular areas such as mathematics and information and communications technology, and French and art and design. Pupils had very good opportunities to develop their skills in citizenship and creativity through a range of classroom and extra-curricular activities. The overall quality of teaching was very good. Staff gave careful consideration as to how to teach knowledge and skills across the curriculum and regularly discussed and shared good practice. In almost all lessons, teachers ensured that the purpose of lessons was clear to pupils and recapped what they had learned at the end of lessons. They gave clear explanations and questioned pupils well to extend their learning. They made effective use of a variety of teaching approaches, including whole-class teaching and paired and group tasks. Interactions between teachers and their pupils were almost all very positive and teachers made effective use of praise.

The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences was very good. Almost all pupils showed good motivation and worked well in lessons. At all stages, they showed very good skills in working independently. They collaborated well in groups and, in particular, in pairs to complete tasks. A commendable proportion of pupils' learning took place in practical, purposeful contexts, especially in mathematics. In personal and social development, pupils in P1 talked well about what it meant to be someone's friend. In geography, pupils in P5 demonstrated a very good knowledge of aspects of continents, countries, and climate. They were able to make and discuss comparisons between life in Kenya and in Scotland. In science, pupils in P6 took part enthusiastically in practical work and showed good understanding of controlled experiments. In French, pupils in P7 were able to take part in extended conversations covering a range of topics, and to write interesting pieces about their houses, food and pets.

Pupils at all stages achieved success in a broad range of areas. They successfully took on responsibilities such as serving on the school's Health Forum. Pupils in P7 who acted as house captains coordinated the school's fund-raising activities and assisted the headteacher in celebrating pupils' achievements at assemblies. Pupils regularly achieved success in inter-school sports tournaments and the Moray Music Festival. They had contributed interesting articles for the Fochaberian community newsletter and successfully participated in arts and crafts activities linked to the annual local flower show. Pupils in P6 had developed their skills in citizenship by organising a mock election, including the production of a DVD of their interesting mock party political broadcasts. Pupils in P7 had gained success in an anti-bullying competition organised by the Scottish Executive. The project had involved writing a musical play which was about to be produced at a local theatre. Pupils contributed regularly to the school magazine, 'Milne's Mag', and had won a competition run by a local newspaper for school newspaper of the year.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. In the last three sessions, only the majority of pupils had achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in writing. These levels had been due to previous important weaknesses in the school's approaches to assessment and did not reflect pupils' actual abilities in writing. Attainment in reading showed an improving trend. Most pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking and reading. At all stages, pupils listened well to their teachers and to each other in lessons. Most pupils spoke confidently and made good contributions to class discussions. At the upper stages, pupils' skills in speaking in public and in groups were insufficiently developed. Most pupils at all stages enjoyed reading. Lower-attaining pupils at the early stages took part enthusiastically in regular 'Story Club' sessions, and showed good skills in talking about books they had read. Pupils in P6 were able to find key information and evidence quickly in a non-fiction text. Across the school, most pupils wrote well, and often very well, for a variety of suitable purposes. Writing tasks given were often well linked to reading or to other areas of the curriculum such as environmental studies or drama. Written work was well presented overall.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. There had been no notable trend in attainment levels in recent years. Most pupils attained appropriate national levels in key aspects of mathematics. Most were making good progress in their challenging and practical coursework. Progress was too slow in a few classes. Pupils' skills in organising information using information and communications technology (ICT) were systematically developed throughout the school. By the upper stages, pupils could use databases and spreadsheets to draw graphs using computers. At the early stages, pupils were developing very good foundations in mathematical skills and concepts, including addition and multiplication. At all stages, pupils were proficient in performing written and mental calculations. Some pupils at the middle stages were unable to measure length accurately. At all stages, pupils' knowledge of shapes and angles was good. Pupils at all stages tackled problem-solving and enquiry systematically, but needed more practice in applying these skills in a wider variety of real contexts. Pupils with additional support needs were making very good progress.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school had very effective arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils. Teaching and support staff responded sensitively to pupils' individual physical, social and emotional needs. Pupils with special medical needs were very well cared for. Pupils were clear about where they could get help and were encouraged to be caring and concerned for each other's welfare. Staff implemented the school's procedures for managing any incidents of bullying and racism effectively. Appropriate arrangements were in place for child protection. The school's effective 'Health Forum' included parents and pupils and had involved the whole school community in taking action on issues such as pupil safety, physical fitness, healthy eating, exercise, and drugs education.

The school's approaches to supporting pupils' learning needs were very good overall. In almost all lessons, the work given provided a suitable level of challenge for pupils. Teachers gave continuous helpful feedback and advice to pupils. In mathematics, pupils in P4-P7 benefited from being grouped for lessons according to their prior attainment. As a result of regular and systematic monitoring of pupils' progress, support for learning staff were deployed in a flexible and highly effective manner. They provided very good support for individuals and groups of pupils who were experiencing difficulties with their learning. Support for learning teachers and the depute headteacher liaised regularly with class teachers and provided them with helpful professional advice on learning and teaching. Pupils with individualised educational programmes were achieving success in their learning. The parents of such pupils received regular, helpful information about their learning targets. The school was broadening its range of strategies to meet the needs of the small number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Support staff were effectively deployed and provided very good support for individual pupils and groups.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|---|
| Quality of accommodation and facilities | The school occupied an impressive, historic building which had been refurbished to a high standard. The extensive grounds had been well developed to provide a variety of play areas. Appropriate arrangements for the security of buildings were in place. Strengths of the accommodation included the well-stocked library and the ICT room. Single and open-plan classrooms were bright and spacious. A number of additional, flexible areas were used effectively for teachers and support staff to work with groups and individual pupils. Accommodation for staff and for the reception of parents and visitors was very good. The bright dining hall was located in a second annexe and staff used this additional flexible space well for learning. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p> | <p>The school had a very welcoming atmosphere. There was a strong sense of identity amongst all members of the school community. Staff were hard-working and committed, and supported each other well. Pupils related positively to staff and to each other, and were polite and well mannered. Almost all wore school uniform. Standards of behaviour were very good. Teachers had high expectations of pupils' attainment and behaviour. They used a range of effective strategies to motivate and reward their pupils. Pupils' personal and academic achievements, good effort and behaviour were celebrated at weekly assemblies. Appropriate opportunities were provided for religious observance. The pupil council had not yet been fully successful in involving pupils in decision making about the life and work of the school. Carefully planned programmes of study provided good opportunities for pupils to learn about issues of equality, including racial equality. Almost all pupils with additional support needs were well included in lessons. However, not all staff and pupils understood issues relating to pupils with specific social, emotional and behavioural needs.</p> |
| <p>Partnership with parents and the community</p> | <p>The school worked hard to involve parents in their children's learning. A very informative handbook and Milne's Mag kept parents well informed about the life and work of the school and pupils' achievements. Parents helped out in classrooms, assisted with excursions and the school pantomime and served on the school's Health Forum. A range of leaflets offered helpful advice to parents on supporting their children's learning. An open week and regular curriculum evenings provided very good opportunities for parents to find out about the work of the school. Parents had appropriate opportunities to give their views on developments such as reporting, health education and homework. The School Board and PTA were highly supportive of, and involved in, the school's work. In particular, the PTA had been very successful in raising funds to enhance the school's resources and environment. The school had strong links with its associated secondary school and with the local community, including local businesses, the police and health service staff which enhanced pupils' learning opportunities. Chaplains from three local churches made regular, effective contributions.</p> |

7. Improving the school

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

Milne's Primary School had many important strengths. It provided a caring environment in which pupils felt safe and well looked after. The broad and balanced curriculum, well-planned programmes of work and high standards of teaching meant that pupils were very well supported in their learning. Attainment was good and showed an improving trend in reading. Pupils achieved success in a broad range of areas. The school's very effective approaches to monitoring pupils' progress and evaluating the quality of its provision meant it was in a strong position to ensure continuous improvement.

The headteacher provided very effective leadership. She had a clear vision for how the school should improve. She had taken effective action to improve teaching programmes, assessment procedures, and approaches to meeting pupils' needs. As a result, all pupils benefited from very good learning experiences. The deputy headteacher supported the headteacher very well. She was very effectively deployed to monitor pupils' progress and to support their learning across the school. The school's approaches to quality assurance were rigorous and wide-ranging. Staff worked together in a collegiate manner to ensure continuous improvement in the school. With the support of the education authority, they had all recently been involved in agreeing a systematic annual programme for formal monitoring of learning and teaching and sampling pupils' work, closely linked to the school's priorities for development. Questionnaires on a range of aspects of the school's work had been issued to parents and pupils and improvements made to provision as a result. The headteacher and her deputy used a highly effective system for tracking pupils' progress in English language and mathematics and used the results to ensure that pupils' learning needs were met effectively.

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:

- continue to improve attainment; and
- continue to develop approaches to supporting pupils with specific behaviour difficulties, including training for staff.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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 the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Jane B Renton
HM Inspector

21 June 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be good

- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Equality and fairness

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.

| What pleased parents and carers most | What parents and carers would like to see improved |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their child enjoyed being at school. • The school had a good reputation in the local community. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school and showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. • The school buildings were kept in good order. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few wanted more information on their child's strengths and weaknesses. • A few felt they did not have a clear idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils. • A few felt that the school did not deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour. |
| What pleased pupils most | What pupils would like to see improved |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • Teachers knew them well, helped them when they had difficulties with their classwork and told them when they had done well. • Teachers checked their homework and expected them to work as hard as they could. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quarter felt that the behaviour of some pupils in school could be improved. • Just under a fifth felt that staff were not good at dealing with bullies and that not all pupils were treated fairly in the school. |
| What pleased staff most | What staff would like to see improved |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school had good relations with the local community. • Pupils' success was regularly celebrated. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few teaching staff felt that indiscipline was not dealt with effectively. |

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk

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