

**Millbank Primary School
Buckie
The Moray Council
10 May 2005**

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1. Background

Millbank Primary School was inspected in February 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, and a group of parents.

The school serves a part of Buckie and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 304, including 50 children 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. The school made provision for pupils with significant additional support needs. These pupils were taught in specially adapted accommodation, referred to in this report as 'the base', and they also attended mainstream classes as appropriate. Records of Needs had been opened for 18 pupils.

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.

- Commitment of staff and quality of teamwork.
- Inclusion of pupils with additional support needs in the life of the school.
- Mental calculation at all stages.
- The range of extra-curricular activities.

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.

Parents and carers were very positive about all aspects of the work of the school. They spoke highly of the commitment of staff. A few felt that incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour had not been dealt with rigorously enough. In general they thought that staff showed genuine concern for their children. A few expressed anxiety

about the frequent changes of class teacher and on the problems which their children had had in adjusting to this. A significant number commented very favourably on the school's work in including pupils with additional support needs. Pupils expressed concerns about bullying and about poor standards of behaviour. They were particularly disappointed about name-calling in school and in the playground, and did not feel that staff treated the issue seriously. However, in discussion with pupils during the inspection, and after observation of pupils in classes and at play, no significant cause for concern in relation to these responses was identified. All staff enjoyed working in the school and thought that it was well led. A number thought that some pupils lacked respect in their dealings with adults.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall structure of the curriculum was good. However, there was scope for freeing up space to offer pupils more challenging activities. Additional time was not adequately focused to support the raising of attainment in English language and mathematics. Pupils did not have enough opportunities for learning through play at the early stages. Well-devised practical work in science increased pupils' awareness of scientific concepts and experimental method. Access to information and communications technology (ICT) was good, and pupils benefited from their experience in using e-mails and in preparing visual presentations. Teachers paid very good attention to mental calculation from the early stages and ensured that pupils used numbers with confidence. Pupils with additional support needs were sensitively included in many aspects of the school's work. The overall quality of teaching was good, and in some instances very good. However, at all stages a few lessons did not have an imaginative approach, and as a result pupils lacked an eagerness to learn. Some teachers used whole class direct teaching very effectively. In general, group and individual work was well organised. Teachers gave clear explanations and instructions and used questioning appropriately to enable pupils to recall and reinforce previous work. They set appropriate homework to reinforce and extend what had been learned in class. Most shared with pupils the objectives of lessons and what was to be learned. They did not make sufficient use of targeted praise to encourage and motivate their pupils.

Most pupils responded well in class. They listened carefully to their teachers and classmates, and most could express their opinions in appropriate terms. Few could elaborate or extend their discussions. Teachers needed to offer more frequent opportunities for pupils to discuss their work and to learn from each other. In a few cases the pace of work was too slow. Older pupils performed well in group music making. At the middle stages, pupils had produced well-observed work in water colours and in oil pastels. At all stages, pupils' skills in movement and coordination were very well developed in physical education.

The pupil council included elected pupil representatives from P4 onwards. It offered pupils a good way to contribute their views on the school. Older pupils looked after younger ones in the playground and helped staff by organising activities during playtimes. Overall, pupils had a good understanding of how to keep fit, and this was

enhanced by a very good range of after-school sports and activities, in which many pupils participated. In addition to physical activities, pupils participated readily in sewing, chess and horse-riding classes organised by the school. Many pupils had achieved success in Scottish country dancing and in local sporting competitions. Older pupils benefited from a well-organised residential visit which helped to develop their self-reliance and social skills. Pupils with special educational needs were very well integrated into the life of the school. Attractive displays of pupils' work celebrated their achievement.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was fair. Standards had not shown signs of improvement. At all stages a few pupils exceeded national levels. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. Overall, however, pupils' attainment was below appropriate national levels in reading and writing. Pupils listened carefully to instructions and to stories, and many showed appreciation and good understanding. At all stages, a few found difficulty in speaking clearly and confidently. Although many pupils read regularly for pleasure, some did not have positive attitudes to reading. At the upper stages able pupils related well to what they read and showed good appreciation and understanding of both prose and poetry. Pupils had good opportunities to develop writing skills, but they did not have sufficiently challenging tasks or opportunities to write at greater length. Their written work contained too many errors in spelling, and some was untidily presented, with poor handwriting. Pupils taught in the base were making good progress in communication and language. Through good use of practical contexts, reading and writing skills were developing well, as appropriate.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. However, standards had not shown any improvement in recent years. Almost all pupils in P3 and most in P6 were achieving appropriate national levels. A majority attained such levels in P4 and P7. A few pupils exceeded the levels, but others were not making sufficient progress. Pupils with additional support needs were progressing well. While most pupils interpreted graphs well, their ability to use computers to display information was not well developed. At the early stages, pupils were making a very good start to number work and were confident in using money and in measuring. Across the school, most pupils were very confident in using a variety of strategies to perform mental calculations. A few pupils in P7 were unsure of fractions and decimals. Most were able to recognise and describe the properties of shapes. At all stages, pupils were acquiring good skills in problem-solving and enquiry. They were able to discuss their methods and explain their solutions. Pupils taught in the base were making good progress. They were developing a good sense of time, and, through good use of ICT, were enhancing their skills in number, money and measurement. A few had a good knowledge of three-dimensional shapes and their key properties.

Personal and social education

Pupils taught in the base were making good progress with their personal and social skills. Most were working well on tasks and activities and the success which they achieved was improving their self-esteem. Pupils approached their learning with confidence. They were very well behaved and related very well to one another and to visitors. Pupils made good progress when working together in pairs or groups in mainstream classes. They were able to act with some independence within their well-structured environment. They did not have appropriately challenging targets for personal and social education in order to promote their independence still further.

5. How well are pupils supported?

All staff provided a good level of support for pupils. They gave high priority to pupils' care and welfare. All knew their pupils very well and were very sensitive to their particular circumstances. They gave high priority to ensuring that pupils were secure and content. The school had effective arrangements for bullying which were well implemented. Although teaching staff had not received recent training on child protection, care and welfare arrangements were good. Pupils clearly understood what they had to do if they had any concerns or worries.

A recently appointed principal teacher managed the base very effectively. Teachers had made a good choice of tasks and activities to provide good support for pupils' learning. Pupils' needs were regularly and clearly identified in discussion between teachers of learning support and class teachers. Staff had cooperated effectively to prepare well-judged individualised educational programmes and to identify well-chosen resources to meet pupils' needs. Classroom assistants gave valuable and well-judged support. The overall quality of provision ensured that pupils' needs were well met.

Support teachers made a significant contribution to pupils' progress through tutorial and group work, and through additional support and teaching to groups in class. Pupils were offered a good range of tasks and activities which provided good practical contexts to support learning. Learning needs were well identified through a range of appropriate assessment items at the early stages, but teachers did not always set effective long-term learning targets or clearly establish pupils' expected progress over a school year. Overall, pupils received good support from specialist outside agencies, though some required more focused input for communication difficulties. The school had developed good arrangements for the transfer of pupils from the nursery to P1 and from P7 to the secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was good. Corridors and classrooms were attractively decorated with good examples of pupils' work in most areas of the curriculum. The buildings were very well maintained. Arrangements for security needed to be reviewed. Resources were plentiful and well organised, though storage space was limited. Senior management had over the years imaginatively adapted accommodation to meet changing needs and circumstances. The good accommodation in the base included a sensory space, a soft play area and a garden. There was very good provision of ICT equipment. The library was well stocked and well used, but some reference books were out of date. Dog fouling in the extensive grounds was sometimes a problem.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school offered a supportive and inclusive environment. Staff morale and relationships with pupils were good. Pupils were polite and mannerly and showed a good sense of respect and tolerance for others. In class they were supportive of one another and cooperative. All staff and pupils worked well together and were proud to be part of the school community. However, staff needed to raise their expectations of pupils' attainment and to offer more appropriate challenge at all stages. Weekly assemblies offered good opportunities to take part in religious observance and, increasingly, to celebrate achievement. In general, pupils were well behaved and respectful to adults and visitors. The school was taking appropriate steps to ensure that racial equality was effectively promoted. Although staff dealt firmly with any incidents of racial intolerance, the school did not yet have a policy to promote racial equality.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had very good links with parents, carers and the wider community. Communication between school and home was of high quality. Regular newsletters, home-school diaries, advice on reinforcing school work at home, and standards and quality reports were helpful. Annual reports gave good information on pupils' progress and on steps which needed to be taken to improve learning. The School Board and the parent-teacher association were</p>

Partnership with parents and the community	very supportive. The School Board was regularly consulted on aspects of pupils' work, including sexual health and personal relationships. Curricular links with the secondary school had been strengthened. There were productive contacts with appropriate external agencies, including the local medical officer, which ensured effective support for pupils and their families. Parents helped with some extra-curricular activities and with residential visits. The school needed to involve parents further in efforts to raise their children's attainment.
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7. Improving the school

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

The school provided a caring environment in which all pupils were valued. Staff worked well to promote fairness, equality and mutual respect. The overall quality of teaching was good. Staff supported one another very well. Teamwork was effective, but a few staff did not feel fully involved in the decision-making process. Standards of attainment were fair in English language and good in mathematics.

The school was well led. The acting depute headteacher and the recently appointed principal teacher supported the acting headteacher in managing the work of the school. All were dedicated and committed. Their relationships with pupils and staff were very good. They had successfully ensured that all pupils were part of the school community, and that all were valued. They had continued to enable pupils with special educational needs to make steady progress in their learning. Parents and pupils had been consulted on how to improve the school's provision. The acting headteacher had acted to raise pupils' attainment in English language by establishing a working group to review the curricular programme. She and the acting depute monitored teachers' work by visiting classes and by checking documentation and forward plans. She had recognised that feedback to teachers should be focused on raising attainment and on ensuring appropriate challenge for all pupils. Staff used quality indicators which had been developed nationally to evaluate their own work. The acting depute provided good assistance, and had previously managed the provision of support for pupils very effectively. The principal teacher had made a very good start to fulfilling her remit. With continuing support, the school had a good capacity for further improvement.

Main points for action

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvement in:

- attainment overall, and particularly in English language;
- challenge offered to pupils and expectations of performance; and
- safety issues identified in the report.

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.

Robert McKinstry
HM Inspector

10 May 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- 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 mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation
- Expectations and promoting achievement

We judged the following to be fair

- Pupils' attainment in English language

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"> • Helpful and informative parents' evenings. • The welcoming atmosphere in the school. • Information on their children's progress. • The school's reputation in the community. • Advice on how they could help with homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way in which the school dealt with inappropriate behaviour. • Stability in staffing.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's efforts to keep them safe and healthy. • Teachers' assistance when they were having difficulties with their work. • Teachers' expectations of hard work. • The fact that they were well known to teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour in school. • The school's efforts to deal with bullying. • Fairer treatment for all.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The working atmosphere in the school. • The concern shown for pupils' care and welfare. • Communication between staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their involvement in the decision making process. • Mutual respect between teachers and pupils.

How can you contact us?

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