

**Newmill Primary School
Keith
The Moray Council
27 February 2007**

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1. Background

Newmill Primary School was inspected in November 2006 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 innovation, and its 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 a group of parents¹. There was no School Board.

The school serves the village of Newmill and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 55. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The welcoming and friendly atmosphere.
- Confident, well behaved pupils.
- The inclusion of pupils with support needs into the school community.
- Relationships between staff and pupils.

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

HM Inspectors 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.

Almost all parents were very pleased with the school. They believed their children enjoyed being at school and were well looked after. They felt the school was well led. A small minority wanted more information about the standards of work expected of pupils, and to be more involved in decisions affecting their children. Pupils enjoyed being at school. They thought that staff treated them fairly, explained things clearly and helped them with difficulties. Staff expressed very positive views about all aspects of the school.

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

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

There were weaknesses in the curriculum provided for pupils. Staff provided a broad range of teaching experiences and had improved the programme for writing in English language. They had recently produced a programme for information and communications technology but it did not include a sufficiently wide range and progression of skills. Additional time was allocated to teaching English language and mathematics but the impact of this on pupils' attainment had not been monitored. Timetabling arrangements did not ensure that all pupils had regular enough opportunities to develop skills in key aspects of the curriculum. The teaching programmes for citizenship, enterprise education and personal and social education needed to be developed further. Although there were some examples of good teaching across the school, the overall quality of teaching was adequate. Lessons were well organised and, in most lessons, teachers gave clear explanations and instructions. They questioned pupils to check their understanding and, in some instances, to extend pupils' thinking. Staff spent insufficient time on direct teaching and lessons did not always build systematically on pupils' prior knowledge. There were some good examples of teachers sharing with pupils what they wanted them to learn. Teachers did not always explain clearly to pupils exactly what they needed to do to succeed in the tasks set for them. Teachers worked conscientiously but inconsistencies in practice and the lack of reliable assessment information lessened the impact of their work.

Pupils were cooperative and most concentrated well on their class work. Across the school the pace of work was too slow and many pupils could have achieved higher standards if more was asked of them. Staff provided some stimulating and challenging activities but there were too many instances of undemanding, low level tasks. Many tasks were completed individually and pupils did not have regular opportunities to work on well planned group tasks. Pupils in P1 and P2 took part enthusiastically in a weekly session of play activities aimed at promoting thinking skills. Those in P3 and P4 could describe science experiments which they had carried out to explore the effects of water pollution. Pupils in P6 and P7 showed a good knowledge of festivals from different cultures. Across the school, pupils studied works by famous artists and were developing good skills in drawing and painting.

The school took good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Pupils responded well to a variety of sporting activities organised through the Active Schools initiative. They took part in *Stay and Play* activities and had good resources for energetic play in the playground. Pupils in P5 were developing good skills in learning to play recorder as part of a local authority initiative. Older pupils had recently helped to present a health promoting workshop to their parents. All pupils were working well together, using their skills in music and drama, to prepare a concert for parents and the local community. They showed concern for others through raising money for charities. Pupils in P4 to P7 were developing citizenship skills through serving on the pupil council, acting as junior road safety officers and supporting the Eco School initiative.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was adequate. The school was unable to provide reliable assessment information about pupils' attainment in listening and talking. The majority of pupils had achieved national levels of attainment in reading and writing. Most performed well in the work set for them but for too many pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Almost all pupils listened attentively and discussed their activities confidently. At the upper stages, pupils expressed their ideas and opinions clearly but their skills in talking in groups required further development. Pupils in P1 and P2 were making a good start to developing their skills in reading simple texts. Those in P3 to P7 were developing an appropriate understanding of how writers achieved their effects. Across the school, pupils wrote for an appropriate range of purposes and audiences. Most pupils presented their work neatly.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Most pupils were achieving or exceeding national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. Progress in learning was too slow for a significant number of pupils. Pupils performed well in their class work but too much time was spent on repetitive exercises or tasks which lacked challenge. Across the school pupils were developing good skills in interpreting information. Pupils in P6 and P7 had not yet developed appropriate skills in using computers to organise and present information. At all stages, most pupils were competent in performing mental calculations. A few pupils at the upper stages were not confident in working with decimals, fractions and percentages. Pupils across the school showed a good knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shapes. At all stages, pupils were confident in using a range of strategies to tackle problems.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Arrangements to meet pupils' learning needs were weak. Teachers and support staff liaised with other agencies to provide effective support for a small group of pupils with support needs. Staff had produced individualised educational programmes but had not involved parents and pupils in the process. The learning support teacher worked well with individuals and small groups requiring extra help but was not deployed consistently to work in classes to raise attainment across the school. Teachers planned conscientiously but activities did not always build on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. Too much time was spent on games and activities which did not always have a clear impact on attainment. The school did not have a fully effective system for assessing, tracking and predicting pupils' attainment. The pace of learning was too often slow, and tasks set for pupils insufficiently challenging. As a result, not all pupils were achieving their full potential.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>Staff were very caring and knew their pupils well. They successfully promoted very good relationships and positive behaviour. Appropriate policies and procedures were in place for children's safety and welfare, including child protection, anti-bullying and promoting positive behaviour. Not all staff had been trained in child protection and a few were unsure of appropriate procedures to follow. The school effectively encouraged pupils to make healthy choices at lunch times. Pupils were developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Arrangements for transfer from pre-school to P1 and from P7 to Keith Grammar School were effective.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was good. The school building was well maintained and secure. Access for those with physical disabilities was good. The playground was well used for energetic play and physical education lessons during good weather. Teaching areas were bright and welcoming and pupils' work was attractively displayed throughout. Office accommodation was limited. A small room was used as both a work base for teachers and a staffroom.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a welcoming atmosphere and pupils were polite and well behaved. They were proud of their school. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Staff cooperated well and were highly committed to the school. Pupils had a variety of informal opportunities to take responsibility for routine tasks and older pupils looked after younger pupils in the playground. There were appropriate opportunities for regular religious observance. Pupils were encouraged to show concern for others through raising funds for charities. Staff treated pupils fairly. They ensured that all pupils felt valued and were fully included in the life of the school. They had recently produced a policy for increasing awareness of racial equality. They set high expectations for pupils' attendance and behaviour but did not set sufficiently high expectations for pupils' achievements.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Staff had established good relationships with parents. The headteacher provided regular and helpful newsletters giving information about events in school. Parents were informed of the teaching of sensitive health issues. They were invited to an annual open afternoon to view the school. This provided good opportunities for informal discussions between parents and staff about tasks and activities undertaken by pupils. New resources were displayed at parents' evenings and the headteacher discussed them informally with parents. The school had recently collaborated with the Health Board to arrange a health promotion workshop for parents. Parents' evenings and reports at the end of each session kept parents informed about their children's progress. The school liaised effectively with other local schools and a range of support agencies.

7. Leading and improving the school

The school provided a caring and supportive learning environment. Relationships between parents, pupils and staff were very positive. The headteacher was highly committed to the school. She had not provided sufficient guidance for staff and had not ensured a consistent approach to learning and teaching across the school. This had reduced the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement. She was very supportive of staff but on occasion had not taken necessary decisive action to improve practice. She did not use her time effectively to track pupils' progress and to manage the development and delivery of the curriculum.

There were important weaknesses in the school's approaches to self-evaluation. Staff had recently used national quality indicators to evaluate their work. The headteacher had not systematically involved parents and pupils in evaluating the work of the school and in identifying priorities for improvement. Following helpful and pertinent advice from the education authority, the headteacher had drawn up a timetable for monitoring learning and teaching. She examined pupils' work and worked alongside teachers in class, but did not give staff direct, constructive feedback. The lack of robust systems for monitoring learning, teaching and attainment was hindering the progress of too many pupils. With continuing support from the education authority and the continued commitment of the staff, the school had the capacity to improve.

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

Main points for action

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

- the structure and balance of the curriculum;
- the overall quality of teaching and learning to ensure pupils' needs are met;
- pace and challenge in order to raise attainment in English language and mathematics; and
- leadership, including monitoring pupils' attainment, and evaluating and improving the work of the school.

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. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority to monitor progress. They will publish an interim report on progress within one year of the publication of this report. Thereafter, HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Isabel Bolton
HM Inspector

27 February 2007

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?	
Structure of the curriculum	weak
The teaching process	adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	weak
Pupils' attainment in English language	adequate
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	good
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	adequate
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents and the community	good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	weak
Self-evaluation	weak

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

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers were good at letting them know about their child's strengths and weaknesses. • Children were well looked after, treated fairly and encouraged to work to the best of their ability. • The school had a good reputation in the local community and was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents wanted more information about the standards of work expected from pupils.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers checked their homework and told them how they were getting on with their work. • Teachers listened to them and told them when they had done something well. • They felt safe and well looked after in school and staff helped them to keep safe and healthy. • They enjoyed being in school and had a say in deciding how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were very pleased with all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few support staff would have liked more involvement in decision making.

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.gov.uk.

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Our complaints procedure

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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 (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spsso.ork.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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