

**Portknockie Primary School
The Moray Council**

26 October 2004

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1. Background

Portknockie Primary School was inspected in June 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 staff and pupils. They 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. Members of the inspection team also met a group of parents. There was no School Board.

The school serves the village of Portknockie and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 74. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- A committed and caring staff.
- Well-behaved and courteous pupils.
- The vision and commitment of the new headteacher to improving the school.
- Spacious teaching and recreational areas.

3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff

Parents thought that staff were approachable, responsive and fair in their dealings with them. They felt that they were well informed about the school's activities through homework books, reports and parents' evenings. A number would have welcomed further involvement in extra-curricular activities. Pupils felt safe and secure in the school and had confidence in their teachers. They appreciated the opportunities for after school activities but would have liked to learn to play more musical instruments. Staff welcomed the proposed improvements planned by the new headteacher and felt reinvigorated by her vision for the school. Support staff appreciated the opportunities to air their views but felt that they could contribute more to the school. All staff and parents thought that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the school's curriculum was fair. It lacked breadth and balance and did not take sufficient account of national and local authority guidelines. Teachers' plans did not pay sufficient attention to religious and moral education or to the expressive arts. There were insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn independently or undertake investigations. The school did not place sufficient emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of citizenship or on enterprise activities. The quality of teaching across the school was generally good, with occasional examples of high quality practice. Explanations and instructions were clear and thorough and many teachers used questioning effectively to check on pupils' understanding. In many lessons positive relationships with pupils created a good sense of purpose. Teachers' thoughtful suggestions encouraged and motivated pupils. Staff provided frequent opportunities for pupils at the early stages to engage in active learning activities, including play, but these activities did not have sufficient structure. Although teachers provided effective support, as necessary, on a one-to-one basis, too few shared the purposes of lessons with pupils. Teachers made good use of homework to support learning. However, some homework tasks lacked variety and did not provide sufficient stimulus to extend pupils' learning.

Pupils were well motivated, hardworking and keen to learn, particularly from P4 to P7. Too often the pace of work for higher attaining pupils was too slow and tasks lacked challenge. Almost all, however, responded well when given appropriately challenging tasks. In English language and mathematics pupils required further guidance about what they needed to do to improve their performance. Staff did not provide pupils with sufficiently clear and challenging learning targets for improving their attainment. There was insufficient use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support and extend pupils' learning. Overall, the quality of pupils' learning experiences was fair.

Most pupils were making good progress in developing confidence and self-esteem. The school's reward scheme for pupils and related certificates were effective incentives to work hard and behave well. School teams and groups participated successfully in competitions and events such as inter-school quizzes and hockey matches. All pupils took part enthusiastically in preparing for the Portknockie Heritage and Fishing Festival. With the help of the community policeman, older pupils had developed their proficiency in cycling. Pupils responded very well to opportunities to participate in community events through contact with the Community Council and local churches.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Standards in reading had improved steadily over the last three years. In writing standards had declined but showed recent signs of improvement. Most pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and in writing. At the upper stages almost all achieved these levels. Most pupils' performance in their coursework was good. Almost all spoke clearly and confidently and showed a good sense of audience. They had good listening skills and used these to gather and note information. Although most pupils read

well for information, they did not read a wide enough range of fiction. Almost all made steady progress in their writing from the early stages but did not write at length for a sufficiently wide range of purposes. At P7, pupils had produced some imaginative pieces of writing which were of good quality with a good use of expressive phrases. Pupils' knowledge and use of English grammar was good at all stages.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good and had improved steadily over the last three years. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. Some were making very good progress and exceeding these levels. At all stages, almost all pupils performed appropriate written calculations accurately. However, pupils' skills in mental calculations were underdeveloped. Across the school, pupils' knowledge and understanding of measurement was too limited. Pupils were confident in using and interpreting information from a range of graphs. They had good skill in creating pie charts and line graphs by hand. However, they only made limited use of ICT to create databases, spreadsheets or graphs. At the upper stages, pupils had a good understanding of the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Although all pupils tackled straightforward tasks in problem-solving and enquiry, most lacked a sufficient range of strategies to deal with more complex problems.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff knew the pupils well and were sensitive to their physical, social and emotional needs. However, appropriate policies, including child protection and anti-bullying, were not yet in place to ensure procedures were consistently applied or effective. Teachers were actively extending their skills to support a wider range of pupils' needs. Pupils knew who to speak to if they had a problem and were confident matters raised would be resolved. Healthy lifestyles were effectively promoted in classroom and playground activities. From P4 onwards pupils had a good understanding of the importance of sport and exercise.

The school had not developed an effective range of strategies to ensure all pupils' learning needs were met. The support for learning teacher successfully supported pupils with additional support needs in small groups. She had developed appropriate individualised education programmes which were regularly shared with parents. The school and education authority had effective procedures in place to open and maintain Records of Needs. Insufficient time was set aside for planning, evaluation and consultation between staff when identifying the next steps for pupils' learning.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The accommodation and related facilities were good overall. The school building was in very good condition. The playground was large and spacious. Classrooms were bright and well-decorated. Storage space was ample. Aspects of the school's security arrangements required urgent review. There were no emergency lights at the fire exits. Many of the learning resources used by pupils were old and out of date. The range of modern fiction available to pupils was too narrow and did not meet pupils' needs and interests.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>There was a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school. Staff and pupil morale was high and improving. Pupils were polite, courteous and well behaved. Staff and pupils were proud of the school. The school had yet to establish a pupils' council and consult with pupils about improving the school. Staff promoted high expectations of good behaviour in school and praised pupils for good work. However, their expectations for pupils' attainment at several stages were too low. There were appropriate opportunities for religious observance. School assemblies were well used to celebrate pupils' achievements. Pupils made new arrivals very welcome. Staff and pupils had successfully established positive attitudes which ensured respect for each other. However, the school had not paid sufficient attention to developing pupils' appreciation of different cultures or to celebrating diversity.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had good links with parents and the local community. Parents felt welcome and were kept well informed about the life and work of the school. They received good reports on pupils' progress. The headteacher had started a series of regular and informative newsletters. The parents' support group actively supported the school through fundraising. They were extensively involved in planning playground improvements. The school chaplain and community police officer contributed effectively to the work of the school. Parents of P1 pupils were given very helpful advice prior to their child's entry to the school. There were good arrangements in place to support pupils transferring from P7 to the local secondary school.</p>

7. Improving the school

Portknockie Primary School had not been successful in ensuring high levels of attainment and achievement across the curriculum. Pupils attained well in some aspects of English and mathematics but their learning experiences were too narrow. Staff were highly committed to the school and to the care and welfare of its pupils. The quality of teaching was good overall but teachers did not challenge all pupils sufficiently. The pace of work was often too slow. As a result some pupils did not make appropriate progress.

In her five weeks in post, the headteacher had conducted a broad audit of the work of the school. She had correctly identified significant areas for improvement. These included improving the curriculum, encouraging teachers to plan their work systematically and having higher expectations for attainment. She had been successful in securing adaptations to the school building to meet the needs of disabled pupils. She had additionally made a start to improving the use of assessment information, to recognising pupils' achievements and tracking and predicting their progress. She had quickly gained the trust and loyalty of staff and pupils through effectively communicating a good, clear vision for the school's future development.

The education authority had provided good support to the school during the period of vacancy for a headteacher. Authority staff had also provided effective support for pupils with additional needs. However, prior to that time, the authority had not challenged the school sufficiently or ensured that pupils' needs were met appropriately. No member of staff had had their work reviewed as part of the education authority's scheme of staff review and development. The school's arrangements for evaluating its work were unsatisfactory. There were no systematic arrangements for assessing, tracking and predicting pupils' progress across the school. Overall, in recent years, the education authority had not been sufficiently pro-active in securing improvements in the school's provision.

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to improve attainment across the curriculum and the quality of pupils' learning. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve the curriculum;
- improve aspects of teaching;
- ensure that pupils' needs are met;
- establish appropriate arrangements for monitoring and self-evaluation; and
- attend to the accommodation and resource issues contained 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. 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 and carers, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector

26 October 2004

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- No aspects were found to be in this category

We judged the following to be good

- The teaching process
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Partnership with parents and the community

We judged the following to be fair

- Structure of the curriculum
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Leadership
- Equality and fairness

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- Self-evaluation

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"> • The enthusiasm, vision and commitment of the new headteacher. • The school's swift response to enquiries. • The support given by teachers to pupils with additional support needs. • A warm, welcoming and supportive staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of teaching resources. • The behaviour of some pupils. • The range of extra-curricular activities. • More information on their children's' progress or difficulties throughout the year.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful, pleasant teachers. • The growing opportunities for after-school activities. • Being in a safe and friendly school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities to play musical instruments. • The challenge presented by some classroom activities. • Playground facilities and equipment.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sense of purpose and direction given by the new headteacher. • Improved communication amongst all staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches to dealing with indiscipline.

How can you contact us?

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.

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

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