

**Yester Primary School
East Lothian Council**

1 October 2002

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Yester Primary School East Lothian Council

1. Introduction

Yester Primary School was inspected in May 2002 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 how well pupils were performing, the effectiveness of the school and how well the school was managed.

HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, mathematics and science within environmental studies.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents. A member of the inspection team also met the Chairperson of the School Board and representatives of the Yester Association of Parents (YAPS).

2. The school

The school serves the village of Gifford and surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 198, including 35 in the nursery class.

Parents' views

Just over half of those parents sent a questionnaire responded. Overall, they were very satisfied with the work of the school.

All thought that:

- the school had a good reputation in the community;
- children were treated fairly; and
- parents' evenings were helpful and informative.

Some parents would have liked more information about their child's strengths and weaknesses and the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils.

Ethos

The school's ethos was very good. Parents, pupils and staff were proud of their school. Visitors to the school were made to feel very welcome. There was mutual respect between pupils and staff. Staff praised pupils for their good work and behaviour. Pupils were very well-behaved and had made many valued friendships across the school. Older pupils helped to look after younger pupils and helped teachers in classrooms. There was an active pupil council which commendably involved pupils from all year groups. Pupils made a good contribution to regular assemblies, which also provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Attendance was above national levels.

School and community

The school had established very good links with parents, other schools, educational support services and the wider community. Examples of these included:

- good informal links with the local playgroup and childminders;
- helpful introductory visits to the nursery for parents and children and good links between the nursery class and P1;

- good support from the School Board and the recently formed YAPS, which organised social and fund-raising activities for the school;
- twice yearly parental interviews, an annual report and regular curriculum evenings on topics such as drug awareness;
- a significant number of parents who helped in the school and collaborated with the P7 'Ground Force' team to build a garden at the front of the school;
- the support of the community policeman in informing children about personal safety; and
- the advice and support given to staff by the educational psychologist.

Accommodation

The overall quality of the accommodation was good. The building was well maintained and secure. Classrooms had been gradually re-furbished over the last three years. There was a spacious school hall and a new library/general purpose area. Play areas included a large grass playing field and a new garden area which had been created by pupils and parents working together. An attractive nursery garden offered a secure, stimulating learning environment for children. Damage from vandalism had greatly improved since the installation of CCTV cameras. However, vehicles were able to enter areas where children were playing. Arrangements for keeping children safe from traffic required to be improved. One or two health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the headteacher.

Staffing and resources

The school was very well staffed. Music and physical education specialists taught regularly in the school. Specialists from the Knox Academy cluster provided good support for the teaching of English language and mathematics. At the time of the inspection, a new learning support teacher had been recently appointed and

the senior teacher was on long term sick leave. Non-teaching staff made a valuable contribution to supporting pupils' learning.

Overall, the school was well resourced. In English language, non-fiction texts had recently been renewed, but more were required for pupils in P4-P7. There was a shortage of up-to-date fiction in the library. Resources to support information and communications technology (ICT) and the teaching of science were in the process of being upgraded. More resources were needed for technology. The headteacher managed the devolved budget very well to support planned developments in the curriculum.

3. How well are pupils performing?

English language

In English language the overall quality of pupils' attainment was very good. Pupils at P1 and P2 were making very good progress. Some at P2 were achieving levels beyond those expected for their age. All pupils at P3 and most at P7 were attaining appropriate national levels in *reading* and *writing* with a significant number exceeding these standards. All at P3 and the majority at P7 were reaching these targets in *listening* and *talking*. Pupils were able to explain their ideas, read familiar texts and write for a good range of purposes. Most at P4 to P7 understood how writers achieve different effects. Some writing activities did not provide a suitable degree of challenge for pupils. At all stages, pupils required to take more care in the presentation of their written work. A few required to check their spelling more carefully for accuracy. Most pupils were ready to contribute their ideas to group discussion but needed more practice to structure and sustain personal talk well. Pupils achieved a good standard of work when using computers for word processing, text-editing and research.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. At P3 and P7, all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in *information handling*, in *number, money and measurement* and in *shape, position and movement*. Across the school, the majority were attaining these levels early. Pupils at all stages could interpret information from graphs well and at P7 they had used a computer to draw graphs. Across the school, pupils had a very good knowledge of the properties of three-dimensional shapes. Pupils at P1 were making a good start to developing skills in mental calculations but at other stages these were generally underdeveloped. In *problem solving and enquiry*, pupils at P3 and P7 could use efficient strategies to solve problems. The presentation of pupils' work was often poor.

Science

Overall, pupils' attainment in science was good. Most pupils had a good recall and understanding of the topics they had studied. At P2, pupils had undertaken experiments on their senses and could make simple deductions from their observations. At P4, pupils could give clear explanations of the water cycle and had made good use of the Internet to investigate the properties of planets. At P4 and P5, pupils had used information collected on school trips to develop their understanding of pollution and conservation. At P5 and P6, pupils had constructed electrical circuits and could explain the melting of ice and the boiling of water. P7 pupils had recorded accurate observations of the growth of plants. Across the school, pupils would have benefited from more challenging tasks.

4. How good is the curriculum?

The school had very good arrangements in place to ensure that pupils experienced a broad and balanced curriculum. There was a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Pupils in P6 and P7 were learning French.

English language

The programme for English language was good overall. It gave very good attention to the development of pupils' skills in reading and writing. Recent steps taken to give pupils more guidance on planning and structuring their writing had produced very good results. The school needed to develop clearer guidance on the progressive development of pupils' skills in listening and talking and how these should be planned and assessed.

Mathematics

The programme for mathematics was good. Appropriate attention was given to developing pupils' skills in information handling, problem solving and aspects of shape. Pupils at P3, were using a computer to help them to master tables and at P7 had been given good opportunities to use computers to interpret information. They required further opportunities to develop efficient skills in mental calculation and to discuss mental strategies.

Science

The programme for science within environmental studies was good. Pupils at all stages had some experience of science topics within a programme which covered key features of science. Most pupils had taken part in practical experiments and had benefited from additional first hand experience during a science week. The programme needed to put more emphasis on developing pupils' skills in interpreting and evaluating evidence.

Environmental studies

The environmental studies programme was of good quality. In addition to science, it gave good emphasis to social subjects and technology. Teachers were collaborating well in adapting class topics to improve progression from stage to stage and to focus more clearly on the specific skills being developed. The programme made good use of visits to places of interest and included appropriate use of ICT to allow pupils to research relevant information.

5. How good is learning and teaching?

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Almost all of the lessons seen were good or very good. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

- Overall, teachers' planning was good. Planning formats had been recently reviewed, and were being developed further to ensure consistency across the stages. Teachers were not yet sharing learning targets consistently with pupils.
- Teachers made good use of direct teaching and gave clear explanations. Praise was used appropriately and homework was issued regularly. Most teachers used questioning to very good effect. Some lessons were very well structured and included reviews of pupils' learning.
- Pupils worked well on classwork and were generally motivated by their learning. The presentation of their work was often poor.
- Teachers made good use of attainment groups in mathematics to match the level of work to individual needs. Across the curriculum, tasks for the most able pupils were not sufficiently demanding.
- Teachers regularly assessed pupils in reading, writing and mathematics and made good use of assessment information. Assessment methods in environmental studies and talking required to be strengthened.

6. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare

Staff provided very good levels of care and welfare for pupils. Staff knew pupils well and responded sensitively

to their physical and emotional needs. Pupils were taught about keeping themselves safe. The school had appropriate policies for child protection and bullying.

Personal and social development

The school's arrangements for personal, and social development (PSD) were good. Pupils' self-esteem and confidence were developed through appropriate classroom activities and effective use of praise. There were many opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities around the school, such as through the buddy scheme and the Pupil Council. Pupils had participated in a popular musical production earlier in the year. Arrangements for extra-curricular activities were restricted by pupils having to travel by bus at the end of the school day. Almost all pupils in P7 had participated in a residential experience. The health education programme gave good attention to education about substance misuse, personal relationships and safety.

Support for learning

The school provided good support for pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning. The headteacher gave assistance to groups of children in mathematics. The newly appointed learning support teacher worked very effectively with individual pupils and small groups both in the support base and in class. She also liaised with class teachers to discuss pupils' needs. A classroom assistant and an auxiliary helped to deliver a very good programme to develop co-ordination skills for pupils in P1 and P2. A few pupils had individualised educational programmes but as yet the learning targets were not clear enough. The targets had been shared with some pupils and parents.

7. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The headteacher, who was in her second year in post, provided very effective leadership. She had a clear vision for the future and had accurately identified appropriate developments to take the school forward. She

encouraged teamwork and had established very good relationships with pupils, parents and staff. Under her leadership, parents had become more involved in the work of the school and attainment had improved. She had made a good start to monitoring the work of the school and supported staff in their professional development. The senior teacher had developed a programme for ICT and supported staff in its delivery. Commendably, the good environmental studies programme had been developed by an unpromoted member of staff. The school's aims were appropriate and had been reviewed recently. There was a comprehensive list of policies which were being updated systematically.

Staff development and review

The school's arrangements for staff development and review were very good. All staff had been reviewed and had identified their development needs. All teaching staff had participated in an appropriate staff development programme which included the use of ICT. There was a strong link between staff development and the schools' priorities for improvement.

School development planning

The development plan was very good. The headteacher had involved staff in auditing the school's work using performance indicators. The ambitious plan had identified appropriate areas for improvement, including improving attainment. There was a focus on the development of ICT to support learning and teaching. The school had made good progress with implementing current priorities.

Approaches to improving quality

The headteacher monitored teachers' plans and regularly visited classes to work with children and to focus on the impact of recent developments. She sampled pupils' work and gave teachers verbal and written feedback on her monitoring activities. Pupils' progress in attainment was closely monitored. The headteacher was planning to develop further the monitoring of pupils' classroom experiences and to provide opportunities for staff to share good practice.

8. How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the school provided a high quality of education for its pupils. Relationships within the school and with the community were very positive. Pupils were attaining very well in English language and mathematics. The majority were attaining national levels early. Most teaching was of good quality. Staff were very committed to the school and were working well as a team under the strong leadership of the new headteacher to further improve this successful school.

Key Strengths

- The very good attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The leadership of the headteacher in identifying and implementing appropriate priorities for improvement.
- The support given to the school by parents, most notably the collaboration with pupils to improve the school grounds.
- The wide spectrum of positive relationships within the school.
- The teamwork of staff and their contribution to the process of development planning.

Main Points for Action

The school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- Teaching programmes in English language and mathematics should be improved in line with this report.
- Teachers should share learning targets with pupils and ensure that the most able pupils are given greater challenge in their work.

- The school and education authority should ensure children's safety in the play areas.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Ann Bielby
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Eastern Division

1 October 2002

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- The school's ethos
- Communication with parents
- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- Provision of staff
- The school's management of devolved finances
- The structure of the curriculum
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- The school development plan
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

We judged the following to be *good*

- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Provision of materials and equipment
- Quality of courses or programmes
- Quality of teachers' planning
- Quality of the teaching process
- Quality of pupils' learning
- Matching the teaching process to pupils' needs and experience
- Using assessment to guide the teaching process
- Effectiveness of the learning support
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work
- Implementing the school development plan

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

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 48% of cases, good in 43% and fair in 9%. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education and Community Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 0131 244 8076. Copies are also available on our web site: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

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 Dr Gill Robinson, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are still dissatisfied with our services, you can contact your member of the Scottish Parliament (or, if you prefer, any other MSP) and ask for your complaint to be passed to the Scottish Parliament Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. He will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, he will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right first if we can.

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