

**Balfron Primary School  
Stirling Council  
19 June 2007**

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## 1. Background

Balfron Primary School was inspected in March 2007 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 the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

The school serves the village of Balfron and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 284, including 49 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Leadership of the headteacher.
- Attainment in reading.
- The quality of pupils' wider achievements.
- Pastoral care of pupils.
- Partnerships with parents and the local community.

## 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.

In their response to the questionnaires and in discussion with the inspection team, parents were positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school. They were

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

particularly positive about the school's good reputation in the community and that their children were treated fairly. All thought the school was well led and that staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. Pupils were positive about the school and their teachers. Almost all felt safe and well cared for, and that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. In response to the questionnaire, about one fifth of pupils reported that they were not certain what to do at school if they were upset. However, in discussion with members of the inspection team, pupils were satisfied that they were clear on what to do in these circumstances. Staff were very positive in their views. All thought that the school was well led, that there was effective communication in the school and that they had good opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.

#### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

##### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The quality of the curriculum was good. Pupils experienced a suitably broad curriculum, including a strong and effective emphasis on physical and health education. Recent improvements in aspects of enterprise education, information and communications technology (ICT) and reading had strengthened learning activities for pupils in these areas. Pupils' experiences were also enhanced by helpful input from a range of visiting specialists in the expressive arts. Teachers made good, negotiated use of available flexibility time to address effectively the learning needs of pupils in their own class. The headteacher had correctly identified areas for further improvement in the curriculum, including aspects of environmental studies and how pupils at the early stages learned through play. Overall, the quality of teaching was good. Teachers made effective use of a wide range of approaches in their teaching. This included some good use of ICT to engage and motivate pupils in their learning. Almost all teachers interacted positively with pupils and used praise effectively. Most shared learning outcomes with pupils in mathematics and aspects of English language. Teachers did not yet, on a consistent basis, reinforce pupils' understanding at the end of lessons. In a few cases, the quality of individual lessons was insufficiently high. Homework activities were carefully planned and, increasingly, offered appropriate challenge for pupils.

The quality of pupils' learning was adequate. Most pupils were motivated and hardworking. In P2/3, pupils collaborated well during writing activities. They took turns appropriately and supported each other effectively in developing creative ideas. Pupils at P5 responded very well to activities in story-telling. They understood the need for audience awareness, and were learning about the importance of eye-contact and the use of the tone of their voice. In religious and moral education, almost all pupils at P7 took on important roles in group activities and contributed well to group discussions and a class debate. Across the stages, pupils made good use of ICT, including at P4/P5, where they were learning to use technology in presenting to an audience. Overall, pupils were at an early stage in learning to reflect on their progress in learning. At times, a few pupils across the stages did not work consistently well without close supervision. The pace of learning did not always offer consistent and sufficient challenge for all pupils.

The school had taken very good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Most pupils were confident and cooperated well with each other and with adults. Pupils for whom English was an additional language were making good progress and were developing their confidence well. Pupils at a range of stages across the school had good opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. Through active involvement in the work of a variety of groups and committees, pupils were learning to influence aspects of the development of their community. Pupils at P6 provided effective support and encouragement to pupils at P2 through their involvement in the popular paired reading project. Older pupils responded very well to opportunities to act as playground buddies to younger pupils. Pupils at various stages benefited from applying and developing skills in a range of contexts. At P7, for example, pupils practised and improved their language and interpersonal skills when serving parents at their well-run 'French café'.

### **English language**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. The school had maintained high levels of attainment in recent years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. A significant number of pupils were exceeding these levels. Most pupils attained appropriate levels in listening and talking. Those pupils who required further support in aspects of English language were making appropriate progress in their class work. Most pupils listened well to adults. By P7, pupils contributed well to group and class discussions. However, the quality of pupils' listening was not consistently good. The quality of attainment in reading was very good. Across the stages, most pupils read fluently and confidently. Older pupils talked knowledgeably about the work of their favourite authors. Pupils across the stages were reflective readers who were able to express their views clearly. They wrote for an increasingly wide range of appropriate purposes. This included, at P7, very effective examples of pupils presenting both sides of an argument and forming a balanced conclusion. Overall, pupils were not consistently and specifically clear about what they required to do to improve their writing.

### **Mathematics**

Overall, the quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Levels of attainment over the last three years had been consistently high. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in key aspects of mathematics. Across the school, a significant number of pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Those pupils who required support in aspects of mathematics were making good progress in their learning. Pupils interpreted information from a range of graphs and were developing appropriate skills in displaying information. Older pupils used the computer confidently to present data in spreadsheets. At all stages, pupils were developing effective skills in mental calculation. Pupils' speed and accuracy in their recall of basic number facts was, however, too inconsistent. Pupils were increasingly skilled in using metric weights and measures and most were confident in using the twelve- and twenty-four hour clock. All pupils had a good knowledge of appropriate two- and three-dimensional shapes. Pupils were familiar with a range of problem solving strategies and had regular experience of applying these in a variety of challenges. Across the school, however, pupils required more regular opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in real-life situations.

## 5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Pupils' learning needs were addressed well. Most tasks set were matched effectively to the needs of pupils. The headteacher had developed and improved whole-school approaches to tracking pupils' progress. In writing, at some stages, teachers successfully encouraged pupils to evaluate their own progress against agreed criteria. In a few lessons, the pace of pupils' learning was not sufficiently rigorous to ensure appropriate challenge for all pupils, including the most able. Working in close liaison with the headteacher, the part-time support for learning teacher worked very effectively with staff to support pupils in their learning. Support staff provided a range of very well-judged assistance to pupils in their learning. The progress of lower-attaining pupils, including those with individualised educational programmes (IEPs), was very good. Parents and pupils were engaged effectively in agreeing and reviewing learning targets set out in IEPs. Staff had developed positive links with a range of agencies to provide targeted support for pupils with additional support needs. Support for identified P7 pupils in preparing for transfer to Balfron High School was very well planned.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Pastoral care	The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff took very good account of pupils' emotional, personal and social needs and knew them well. Appropriate child protection, anti-bullying and safe use of the Internet policies were in place and known by staff. The programme for personal and social development gave very good attention to developing pupils' awareness of issues related to health, safety and personal relationships. The school promoted the development of a healthy lifestyle and was working towards the achievement of first level accreditation as a Health Promoting School. Pupils participated in a range of stimulating events including cross country running and a walk-to-school week. Playground assistants had developed very appropriate and supportive methods for supporting pupils during breaks.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation and facilities was good. Building security arrangements were appropriate and the school was well maintained. Staff had created an attractive environment for pupils. Classrooms were bright and pupils' work displayed to good effect. Staff made good use of the additional teaching spaces for a variety of appropriate learning activities. Pupils had regular and effective access to the ICT suite. However, the size of the classrooms limited the range of learning activities in some cases. The limited size of the hall restricted its use for aspects of physical education. The school, however, made very good use of the resources available in the Balfron Campus. This included some use of the swimming pool, areas of the physical education department and daily use of dining facilities. In partnership with parents and pupils, the school had improved aspects of the attractive playground area. Access and facilities for users with restricted physical mobility was very good.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school was very welcoming of parents and visitors. Relationships between staff and pupils were good and most pupils were well behaved. However, the behaviour of a few pupils at a range of stages was not sufficiently positive. Most pupils took a pride in the school and its many achievements. Staff used praise well to motivate and encourage pupils. Their expectations of pupils' attainment, however, were not yet consistently high. The school held regular assemblies which were used effectively to celebrate success and explore the school's identified values. There were appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Led by senior managers, staff promoted a positive climate of equality and fairness. The school had not yet, however, embedded its approaches to promoting an understanding of race equality and diversity through the curriculum.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had developed very strong and effective links with parents and the local community. Regular newsletters, phone calls and an open door approach ensured effective communication between home and school. Parents were well informed about the school's approach to education in sensitive health issues. Annual reports and meetings with staff provided parents with good information about their children's attainment and progress. Parents gave generously of their time to support the school in a range of areas. This included involvement in the development of the school's values, improvements to the grounds, improved safety around the school and the development of the school web site. The School Board and PTA provided very good support for the school. The headteacher had established productive links with the local community to enhance the work of the school. Working with members of the community, the school had developed an effective transport plan. The school had a number of very positive links with both the nursery class and Balforn High School.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Balforn Primary School provided its pupils with a good quality of education. Under the leadership of the headteacher, the school had improved experiences for pupils in a range of important areas. Staff worked in close partnership with parents and the broader community. They ensured that pupils' learning and pastoral needs were well met. Pupils attained well in English language and mathematics. The level of expectation and challenge provided for pupils was not yet, however, sufficiently and consistently high enough.

The headteacher led the school very well. In her two years in post, she had developed very positive relationships with pupils, parents and staff. In close liaison with the school community, she provided a clear strategic direction for the school in how it addressed pupils' learning needs. She had successfully established strong teamwork among staff and highly effective links with parents and the community. She had led improvements in approaches to learning and teaching in a range of curriculum areas and had ensured that pupils were fully involved in contributing to the life of the school. The deputy headteacher worked closely and effectively with the headteacher in securing identified improvements. The two principal teachers fulfilled their remits well. The headteacher was highly reflective in how she addressed school improvement. She had introduced and developed a range of helpful approaches to improve the quality of pupils' experiences. She was committed to the involvement of pupils, staff and parents in influencing and evaluating the work of the school. Senior managers regularly invited and acted upon the views of parents. They had developed sound

processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching in the school. Effective use of these processes had begun to improve the consistency of the quality of learning and teaching across the school. The headteacher had prioritised successfully the development of approaches to tracking pupils' progress through attainment levels. Building on these successes, senior managers now required to ensure that developments in self-evaluation resulted in consistent progress in pupils' classroom experiences. With clear attention to the pace of pupils' learning, and the continued support of the education authority, the school was well placed to improve upon the good standards it had achieved.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority should take action to improve further:

- the quality of pupils' learning experiences, including how well pupils reflect on their progress and help plan their next steps in learning;
- the level of pace and challenge in pupils' learning; and
- how staff ensure that self-evaluation leads to sustained improvement in identified outcomes for pupils.

### **What happens next?**

As a result of clear evidence of improvement and the very effective leadership of the headteacher, 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. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Peter McNaughton  
HM Inspector

19 June 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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

<b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b>	
Meeting pupils' needs	good

<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	very good

<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Leadership across the school	good
Self-evaluation	good

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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents were very satisfied with almost all aspects of the work of the school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few reported that teachers were not always good at letting them know their children's strengths and weaknesses.</li> </ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were having difficulty with their classwork.</li> <li>• Teachers listened to what they said.</li> <li>• Staff helped them keep them safe and healthy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About one fifth reported that they were not clear what to do if they were upset at school.</li> </ul>
<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>

## **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 Children's 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, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. or by telephoning 01506 600384. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, HMCI, at the above address.

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 the HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure leaflet is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://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@spsa.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsa.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.spsa.org.uk](http://www.spsa.org.uk).

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