

**Strathblane Primary School  
Blanefield  
Stirling Council  
5 June 2007**

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## 1. Background

Strathblane Primary School was inspected in February 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 and representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

The school serves the villages of Strathblane and Blanefield and the surrounding rural areas, including the hamlets of Mugdock and Carbeth. At the time of the inspection the roll was 181. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Polite, courteous, well behaved pupils.
- Staff commitment to the school and their attention to ensuring the wellbeing of pupils.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics.
- School Board and PTA support for and involvement with pupils.

## 3. What are the views of parents, 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.

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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.

All parents felt that staff made them feel welcome and that there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. Almost all parents thought that the school had a good reputation in the local community and that their child found school work stimulating and challenging. Almost all pupils felt that teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability and helped them when they were having difficulties. They reported that they enjoyed being at school and got on well with other pupils. In responding to questionnaires, the majority of pupils said that staff were good at dealing with bullying. Most pupils felt that the behaviour of pupils in school was good. All staff were very positive about the school. All thought that they showed concern for the care and welfare of the pupils. All reported that they enjoyed working in the school and that the school was well led. Most teaching staff stated that there was regular discussion about how to achieve school priorities. A few support staff wanted to be more involved in the decision making process.

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

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

The school provided pupils with a broad and balanced education. Staff made appropriate use of available time with a focus on raising attainment. French was being taught well at P6 and P7. Pupils had appropriate opportunities to learn through play at P1 and P2. The school was making good progress towards ensuring that all pupils had at least two hours of physical education each week. Pupils' learning experiences were enhanced by the contribution of visiting specialist teachers for art, music and physical education. The programme for the development of reading at the early stages required further revision. Approaches to teaching writing did not ensure appropriate continuity and progression of skills. The school was developing a structured programme for personal and social development. Appropriate attention was given to developing pupils' skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Most teachers gave clear instructions and helpful explanations. They used a variety of teaching approaches to provide stimulating and informative lessons. Most teachers shared learning intentions with pupils and, occasionally, rounded off lessons with a revision of the main points. However, these approaches were not consistent across all stages and areas of study. All staff had established good working relationships with pupils and most used praise well to motivate them and to recognise their successes. Most teachers made effective use of questioning to check what pupils knew and to consolidate new skills and ideas. In a few lessons, pupils had opportunities to respond with extended answers and time to develop their thinking. Regular homework offered opportunities to reinforce recently developed skills and knowledge. However, at times it was too repetitive and did not challenge pupils sufficiently. Teachers made good use of ICT to teach many aspects of the curriculum, for example English and French.

Almost all pupils were well behaved, listened attentively and participated confidently in their learning. They answered questions enthusiastically and carried out written and practical tasks effectively. In most lessons, pupils worked well in groups and individually and remained focused on the tasks set. In several lessons pupils used task boards successfully when solving problems collaboratively with others. In a minority of lessons, the pace of learning was too slow for the more able pupils, many of whom were capable of achieving more. Pupils had good opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning, for example in their project work and in creating

electronic presentations. Too often, pupils were given insufficient time to think for themselves and to reflect on ideas and experiences.

The school assisted pupils to broaden their achievements in a variety of ways. The school choir performed successfully at the end-of-term church services and in the local community. Pupils learned important facts about local democracy through representing the school on the local Greenheart committee which was working hard to improve local amenities. Almost all pupils were involved in a variety of out-of-school activities such as through the art club, sporting and musical activities. Participation in these activities helped pupils to become more confident in working with others and to develop their self-esteem. Pupils in P7 supported younger pupils well in the playground as part of the school's 'Playground Squaddies' team. Pupils were actively involved in the decision making process at school level through the pupil council. Representatives on the pupil council had, for example, worked effectively with the School Board and the PTA to improve their playing fields. These activities helped pupils to develop their organisational and leadership skills. Staff had helped raise pupils' awareness of the global importance of sustainable development. At P5, for example, pupils were responsible for collecting waste paper and cardboard. Pupils at P6 had raised money for children in Eritrea by selling gifts made from recycled materials.

### **English language**

Pupils' attainment in English language was good, overall. Pupils' attainment in reading had remained steady in recent years. There had been a slight decrease in attainment in writing. Across the school, almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and most were doing so in writing. At P2, one quarter of pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, a few pupils across the school, and particularly at the early stages, were capable of even higher levels of attainment. Pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress. At most stages, pupils listened well to instructions. They spoke confidently about their personal experiences. At P4, pupils had engaged in a very effective debate about the benefits of drinking water. Across the school, pupils read fluently and with good expression. They understood the main ideas in text they had read. At P7, they showed a good appreciation of a range of poetry and of the writing styles of different authors. Across the school, pupils were not good enough at writing at length. At almost all stages, the standard of handwriting and presentation was not sufficiently high.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good. Over the last three years, pupils' attainment in mathematics had improved steadily. Almost all pupils at P3 and P6, and most at P4 were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. All pupils at P2 and most at P5 were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Overall, all pupils were making good progress in their coursework. At all stages, most pupils were confident in handling and displaying data. Pupils at P7 knew how to conduct a survey, record outcomes and display findings accurately. Those at P1 to P3 were developing effectively their skills and understanding of early number processes. Across the school, pupils performed mental and written calculations well. They also had a good understanding of measurement. At all stages, most pupils showed a good understanding and knowledge of shape. Working well with others, they were able to use a range of

strategies to solve problems. At all stages, pupils used ICT effectively to enhance their learning and to help raise their attainment in mathematics.

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

The quality of arrangements to address the needs of pupils was adequate. In the majority of lessons, teachers provided a good range of activities and tasks. However, across the school, tasks and activities did not always match the needs of all pupils and were not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for the higher attaining pupils. At all stages, several pupils were capable of achieving higher standards. Most pupils were insufficiently clear about what they needed to do to improve their current performance. They were not consistently involved in setting their own learning targets for future progress. The part-time support for learning teacher supported individual pupils and small groups effectively, mainly in aspects of English language. The deputy headteacher provided a good support to groups of pupils in classes. The school had suitable working arrangements with other support agencies, for example speech and language therapists. Pupils with additional support needs had individualised educational programmes (IEPs) in place. These IEPs set out clear short- and long-term learning targets which were subject to regular review. However, the steps taken by the school to implement the education authority's staged intervention arrangements for a significant minority of pupils required review to ensure that their specific needs were being addressed.

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

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The quality of pastoral care in the school was good. Staff knew pupils very well and were responsive to their social and emotional needs. Staff were aware of the arrangements for the safe administration of medicine and of the school's clear procedures to deal with instances of child protection and racism. The majority of pupils were confident that staff would address bullying incidents. Steps needed to be taken, however, to ensure that the significant minority who were concerned about their perception of bullying had their concerns suitably addressed by staff. The school was currently reviewing its anti-bullying policy. The school promoted healthy living through a variety of approaches that included healthy eating initiatives, participation in regular physical activity and provision of free fruit. School lunches were popular with pupils, well presented, and of good quality. Pupils were given good opportunities to try new food in the canteen and gave their views about menu choices. Arrangements for supporting pupils' transfer from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Balfron High School were well planned and implemented effectively.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation and facilities was good. Staff had created a bright and stimulating learning environment through use of effective displays of pupils' work. Many areas around the school had been recently redecorated and new curtains and furniture purchased. However, other areas required further attention, including corridors and pupils' toilets. The school used all available space effectively. The spacious hall was used well for a variety of purposes such as physical education, additional learning activities and for dining. Pupils made good use of the large playground. Cleaning, catering and janitorial staff kept the school clean and tidy. Building security arrangements were appropriate. Only the ground floor provided disabled users with appropriate access.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff offered visitors a very welcoming and positive reception. Pupils were polite, well-behaved and worked and played well together. Relationships between pupils and staff were very good. Pupils, parents and staff identified strongly with the school. Staff worked well together, including when they shared responsibility for teaching the same class. Senior pupils assisted pupils at P1 and P2 as playground helpers. Most staff had high expectations of pupils' attendance, and behaviour. Occasionally, their expectations of what pupils could attain were not high enough. Almost all pupils had high expectations of themselves and of their peers. Staff made good use of praise to encourage and reward pupils and there was a strong ethos of achievement throughout the school. Assemblies were held regularly with special assemblies to celebrate pupils' progress and achievements. The school provided pupils with regular opportunities for religious observance. Approaches to promoting pupils' awareness of diversity and race equality were insufficiently developed.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had a good partnership with parents and the wider community. The School Board and PTA had worked very effectively with the school's eco committee to establish and improve safer routes to school. Parents assisted in various out-of-school activities, through contributing to football and art clubs, and helping on outings. The headteacher consulted parents effectively on sensitive health education materials the school intended to use. The school had successfully linked its new web site to the community's web site. Parents received helpful reports on the progress of their child and informative newsletters about what was happening in the school. Teachers met with parents to discuss their child's progress once each year. However, the school needed to involve parents more effectively as partners in their children's learning. The school had effective links with the local secondary and other primaries. It had also developed productive links with local community organisations, for example the local Rotary club.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Strathblane Primary School provided pupils with a good standard of education within a stimulating and caring environment. Staff provided them with relevant and well-organised learning experiences. Overall, pupils were progressing well in their learning and benefited from a wide range of out of school activities. Pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good and in English language was good overall. Pupils now needed to be challenged consistently to achieve better across the curriculum.

The experienced, efficiently organised and committed headteacher led the school well. She had a clear view of the strengths of the school and had identified appropriate priorities for improving learning and teaching. She had developed and maintained positive relationships with parents and the wider community. She knew her staff well and provided pupils with a range of opportunities to participate in the wider life of the school. She had introduced collegiate working within the school and had delegated responsibilities to the deputy headteacher and other teachers. She now needed to ensure that learning and teaching approaches across the school met the needs of all pupils and to involve staff fully in the quality assurance process. The deputy headteacher supported the headteacher effectively and carried out her duties well. Most staff were involved in sharing good practice through curriculum development groups, which helped them in their teaching. The headteacher provided feedback on teachers' forward plans, monitored pupils' work and observed lessons. She had carried out a number of surveys with pupils and parents and had succinctly collated their responses and incorporated them into the school improvement plan. She discussed pupils' progress with teachers and tracked pupils' attainment appropriately. However,

overall, approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance were not comprehensive and rigorous enough. Teachers were not sufficiently involved in self-evaluation with a view to improving learning and teaching. There was a need to focus more clearly and objectively on the quality of pupils' learning experiences in order to provide greater challenge and raise attainment further. These developments were required to ensure a greater and more effective capacity for improvement.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority should take action to improve learning and teaching. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve approaches to writing to ensure greater continuity and progression of pupils' skills;
- ensure that the pace and level of challenge for all pupils is improved;
- monitor more systematically the progress of all pupils in order to encourage and support them in improving their attainment; and
- develop a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation to ensure improvement in pupils' learning experiences.

### **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. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Hakim Din  
HM Inspector

5 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	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

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

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

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

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>• Their children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards and were good at letting parents know about children's strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• Consulting with them on decisions which affected their child and responding to their concerns.</li> <li>• Explaining to them how they could support their child with her/his homework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A quarter of the parents felt that the school building could be better maintained.</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 told them when they did something well and helped them when they were having difficulties.</li> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly and checked their homework.</li> <li>• Teachers listened to them and told them how they were progressing in their work.</li> <li>• They felt safe and well looked after.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff could deal with bullying incidents better.</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>• Staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school.</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 ` 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 600372. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **If you wish to comment about primary inspections**

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

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management Unit, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail [HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk). A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 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@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk).

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