

**Avonbridge Primary School  
and nursery class  
Falkirk Council  
4 September 2007**

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## 1. Background

Avonbridge Primary School and nursery class were inspected in May 2007 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and 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 at the primary stages.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the School Board 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 village of Avonbridge near Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the roll was 79, including 23 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The pupils' involvement in environmental, enterprise and ecological activities which had led to them achieving several national awards.
- The effective teamwork of all staff and their commitment to pupils' care and welfare.
- The welcoming ethos of the school and the positive 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.

Parents were pleased with most aspects of the school and nursery class. They felt that the school set high standards for pupils' attainment and that pupils were encouraged to

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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.

work to the best of their ability. They believed that parents' meetings were helpful and informative and they felt welcome in the school. Around half of parents had concerns about the school building. Around a third had concerns about the school's reputation in the local community and about the school's procedures for dealing with the behaviour of some pupils. Pupils felt that they were treated fairly and that they had a say in deciding how to make the school better. They felt that teachers knew them well and expected them to work hard. Around a quarter of pupils felt that the behaviour of others was not good. A few pupils felt that the school could deal more effectively with bullying. Almost all staff were positive about the school's work. They enjoyed working in the school and felt there was mutual respect between them and pupils. They felt that pupils were well cared for and that the school was well led.

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

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

Staff in the nursery provided a suitably broad range of activities. Children were happy, settled and secure in the nursery routines. They were well supported to make choices in their learning through good interaction with adults. Most cooperated well, shared toys and took turns when playing. They were forming friendships and most were aware of the needs of others. There was scope for staff to develop children's responsibility and independence in a wider range of activities. Children enjoyed growing seeds, and observing the change in materials when making dough. They were developing skills in using programmable toys but they had too few opportunities to develop skills in problem-solving and investigating. Children sang enthusiastically, and staff supported them well to develop their understanding of rhythm when using percussion instruments. Children mixed thick paints and selected from a wide range of craft materials to express their ideas and feelings creatively. They rode wheeled toys enthusiastically, developed their awareness of space and balanced on stilts when playing outdoors. However, the physical equipment outdoors did not provide children with sufficient challenge.

The quality of the primary school curriculum was good. Staff made effective use of flexibility time to improve pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils experienced a wide range of activities that enabled them to develop relevant skills in citizenship and enterprise. Staff were beginning to make effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning and teaching. Pupils were making good progress in developing their understanding of health issues, but did not yet have two hours of physical education (PE) to improve their fitness. Specialist teachers made effective contributions to pupils' learning in PE, music, craft, drama and French. Pupils at the early stages needed more opportunities to learn through well-planned play activities. There were some good lessons, particularly at the upper stages, but the quality of teaching overall was adequate. Teachers were well organised and planned their work effectively. While they made some effective use of questioning to check recall, it was not always used well to challenge thinking or assess pupils' understanding. Teachers planned an interesting range of experiences in a few curriculum areas. However in English language and mathematics, teaching approaches were not sufficiently varied and there was an over-reliance on worksheets and commercial textbook exercises. In the most effective lessons, the pace was brisk, teachers shared lesson aims, gave clear explanations and provided helpful feedback to

pupils on how to improve their work. However, this standard was not consistently maintained across the school. On a few occasions, teachers gave pupils insufficient guidance and direction and lessons did not provide sufficient challenge. Homework was well planned and appropriately linked to coursework, but did not focus on a wide enough range of tasks.

The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences was adequate. Pupils settled well to their classwork, were mostly well behaved and responded well to teachers' questions. A few lessons involved pupils in interesting activities, for example in the P6/7 class where pupils were investigating their pulse rates when resting and active. However, there were too few opportunities for pupils to be active and to learn independently. Pupils responded well when they were able to work collaboratively on a task in P4/5 by producing charts contrasting village life with living in a town. Pupils would benefit from more of such opportunities in English language and mathematics. At all stages, pupils were learning effective skills in drama and physical education. Pupils needed more opportunities to learn in different ways, to be creative and expressive, to think critically and to set and evaluate their own targets for learning.

The school placed a strong and effective emphasis on developing pupils' wider achievements. Pupils were becoming increasingly aware of the importance of good diet and healthy lifestyles through a health promotion week and running a "Tastebud Tingles" tuck shop. Pupils had developed positive attitudes to many aspects of responsible citizenship through participation in the pupil council and acting as playground helpers. Pupils were developing positive attitudes to the environment through the work of the school's eco group, which had gained a national silver award. They were developing environmental awareness and had participated in a project involving recycling textiles. Pupils used e-mail regularly to correspond with pen pals in a school in New Zealand. They developed confidence and enjoyed a sense of achievement through participation in concerts, science and technology festivals, competitions and entertaining local senior citizens. The annual residential experience for P7 pupils developed their social skills well and gave them the opportunity to participate as part of a team in a wide range of outdoor activities.

### **English language**

Children in the nursery were making good progress in communication and language. They spoke confidently to adults and each other and listened well to instructions and stories in small groups. Most recognised their name in print and many were attempting to write their name. Children developed early writing skills when playing imaginatively and making patterns in sand. A few children used books independently. However, there was scope for staff to make more effective use of signs, labels and printed materials to encourage children's interest in reading. In the primary classes, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. It had fluctuated in recent years but there had been a steady improvement in the last two years. Across the school, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading, and writing. All pupils in P2, and a few at other stages were achieving appropriate national levels in reading and writing earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who required support with aspects of their learning were making good progress. At all stages, pupils had regular opportunities to listen and talk to

others. Almost all pupils listened attentively to their teachers and responded well to questions. While a majority of pupils were able to express their views in group and class discussions, others needed support and lacked confidence in organising and presenting their ideas. Most pupils in P1 and P2 had made a good start to developing early literacy skills. Across the school, most pupils were able to read with good expression and understanding. They were less skilled at analysing texts and discussing authors' writing styles. Pupils at the early stages did not write often enough. Those at P4 to P7 wrote at length and for a wide range of purposes. Most pupils used appropriate sentence structures and punctuation in their writing and presented their work neatly and accurately.

## **Mathematics**

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. Most could recognise basic numbers and shapes, count to ten and match and sort simple objects. Many children used mathematical language appropriately when playing but had too few opportunities to develop skills in measuring and problem-solving. Attainment in mathematics in the primary classes was adequate. There had been no significant improvement in the past three years. At the early stages, all pupils had achieved appropriate national levels of attainment while in the middle and upper stages, most pupils had achieved these levels. At P2, P4 and P7 around half of pupils had attained these levels earlier than might normally be expected. However, a few pupils required further consolidation of particular aspects within the levels they had attained. Pupils who required support with their learning were making steady progress. Across the school, most pupils had an appropriate understanding of information handling. They had effectively used real life contexts to carry out surveys and record the results. Pupils were not sufficiently skilled in using databases and spreadsheets. At all stages, most pupils performed written calculations well but they were not sufficiently quick and accurate in carrying out mental calculations, particularly with multiplication. There were weaknesses in pupils' understanding of fractions and decimals. At all stages, pupils could identify an appropriate range of shapes. Throughout the school, pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry required further development. Most pupils were aware of an appropriate range of strategies they could use to solve mathematical problems but they did not confidently apply these strategies.

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

Arrangements for meeting children's and pupils' needs were adequate. Staff in the nursery systematically observed children at play and assessed their progress. They used this information well to plan the next stages in learning for individuals. Children for whom English was an additional language were well supported by nursery staff. Staff had introduced play activities at P1 to P3 in response to recent national advice. However these activities did not build well on the independent learning in the nursery, and did not meet the needs of all pupils. Staff in the primary school knew pupils well and were very sensitive to their physical and emotional needs. While tasks and activities were generally matched appropriately to pupils' needs and abilities, staff did not always set sufficiently challenging tasks for abler pupils. Teachers often took effective steps, such as grouping pupils by prior attainment, to meet the differing needs of pupils in their class. Regular tracking meetings

had been introduced to discuss pupils' progress. However, teachers did not always make sufficient use of assessment information to accurately evaluate pupils' progress or to identify next steps in learning. The part-time learning support teacher gave good support to pupils who were experiencing difficulties in their learning. Individualised educational programmes (IEPs) were used to set learning targets and these took good account of recommendations made from external agencies. IEPs were shared with parents and used well to support pupils' learning in the classroom. The support assistant made a very positive contribution to supporting individuals and groups of pupils throughout the school.

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

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The quality of pastoral care was very good. Teaching and support staff knew what to do about child protection issues. They worked effectively together to promote positive behaviour and a very caring ethos. Almost all pupils felt secure and happy in the school and knew what to do if they had concerns over issues such as bullying or their own personal safety. The school had recently set up an anti-bullying group, in response to pupils' concerns, to tackle ongoing issues with a very small number of pupils. The school had effective arrangements in place for transferring children from nursery into P1 and pupils from P7 to Braes High School. The school monitored attendance well and had clear procedures for checking on children and pupils who were absent from school. The programme for personal and social development included an appropriate focus on health. Pupils had been involved in developing and managing a healthy tuck shop and water was readily available for all pupils. Nursery children were able to choose from a range of healthy snacks and drinks.</p>

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p>Quality of accommodation and facilities</p>	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. The school building was well maintained and building security arrangements were appropriate. Aspects of security of the school grounds were being actively reviewed by the education authority. Classrooms were bright, well furnished and enhanced by displays of pupils' work. The gymnasium had no storage for physical education equipment and portable staging, and these posed a safety hazard to pupils engaging in physical activity. Nursery pupils used the main school toilets which were located some distance from the playroom which restricted children's independent use. Access to a well-equipped ICT suite enhanced learning and teaching. There was appropriate access to the building but there was no disabled toilet facility.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>The overall climate of the school was welcoming and positive. Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Pupils were polite, spoke confidently to visitors and treated one another with consideration and respect. Staff set appropriately high expectations of pupils' attendance and behaviour but needed to set higher expectations for abler pupils' attainment and achievement. Pupils had opportunities to take on responsibilities through the pupil council, through running the tuck shop and acting as playground buddies. Staff ensured that all pupils were included in the school community and they successfully promoted a sense of equality and fairness by teaching and through example. Aspects of the school's programme, including religious and moral education, helped promote positive attitudes to others, a sense of equality and a celebration of difference. Regular assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' efforts and achievements.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had an effective partnership with the wider community and with most parents. The School Board had provided helpful fund-raising assistance and support to the school's work. Pupils benefited from a range of useful links with the local community. These included visiting chaplains, an Active School's Coordinator, local businesses, other schools and the education authority. Pupils were benefiting from increasingly productive links with the associated secondary school. The school kept parents well informed by regular newsletters and helpful written reports on pupils' progress. Staff were increasing the opportunities to share information more regularly with parents through the home-school assessment diaries. Teachers had sought consent from parents for pupil's participation in sensitive aspects of the health education programme.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Avonbridge Primary School provided a warm and welcoming environment for children and pupils. Staff were hardworking and committed, and worked effectively as a team to ensure high quality pastoral care. The nursery provided a good range of play experiences for children. Pupils were happy in school and many achieved success from their participation in a wide range of activities in music, dance, science, technology and enterprise. Attainment was good in English language and adequate in mathematics but there was scope for improvement. The atmosphere in the school was friendly and positive but not always sufficiently purposeful. The quality of teaching was too variable and staff did not have high enough expectations of pupils' learning. The school provided some opportunities for pupils to develop skills as independent learners in areas such as enterprise and ecological activities. However, these approaches needed to be developed more widely across the curriculum to ensure all pupils are given sufficient challenge and opportunities to exercise responsibility. Overall, pupils were capable of achieving more.

The highly experienced headteacher led the school well. She gave a high priority to fostering teamwork and was well respected by pupils, staff and parents. She had established strong partnerships with families, support agencies and the local community to support and enhance pupils' learning. She had successfully secured significant funding to improve ICT provision throughout the school. Working with staff, she had improved aspects of the curriculum including reading, writing and enterprise activities. She had established very strong teamwork but needed to support and challenge staff to develop a wider range of teaching approaches. She had successfully shared her vision of the strategic direction for the school with staff and was committed to its continuing improvement. The school had good arrangements for evaluating the quality of its provision. All staff had been involved in auditing their work using quality indicators developed nationally. Teaching staff regularly discussed pupils' attainment with the headteacher although staff needed to make better use of tracking systems to monitor and extend pupils' progress in learning. The school had sought parents' views on aspects of its work and consulted pupils through the pupil council. The headteacher monitored teachers' plans and the quality of learning and teaching during focused class visits, and provided helpful written comments to staff. The headteacher now needed to work alongside teachers to ensure that monitoring activities are carried forward more systematically and have a greater impact. With a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation focused on the quality of learning and teaching, the school, with the support of the education authority, had the capacity to improve provision for pupils.

At the last Care Commission singleton inspection of the nursery class, there were two requirements and seven recommendations. Falkirk Council had addressed the one requirement and four recommendations relating to safe recruitment practices by developing a detailed action plan which was submitted to the Care Commission. The remaining requirement and three recommendations had been satisfactorily addressed by the school. Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice.

### **Main points for action**

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

- continue to raise attainment;
- ensure appropriate pace and challenge in all lessons to meet the needs of all pupils;
- provide more opportunities for pupils to be independent, active learners;
- ensure monitoring of classroom practice leads to improvements in teaching and in the quality of pupils' learning experiences; and
- address gymnasium safety and outdoor security matters.

### **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.

May C Geddes  
HM Inspector

4 September 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	adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	adequate

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

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

<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Leadership of the headteacher	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>• Their children found school work stimulating and challenging.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards and encouraged pupils to work hard.</li> <li>• School reports and parents' evenings were helpful.</li> <li>• Parents felt welcome in school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost half the parents felt that the school building was not kept in good order.</li> <li>• Around a third of parents felt that the school did not have a good reputation in the community.</li> <li>• Around a quarter felt that there was not mutual respect between pupils and teachers and that the school did not deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour.</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>• Staff knew them well, treated them fairly and told them when they had done something well.</li> <li>• Pupils had a say in making decisions and felt safe and well looked after in school.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work hard and checked their homework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Around a quarter of pupils thought that the behaviour of other pupils was not good.</li> <li>• Around a fifth of pupils thought that the school could deal more effectively with bullying.</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>• All teaching staff and almost all support staff held very positive views about the school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the involvement of staff in decision making and ensure all staff are briefed on child protection 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 Education, 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, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 1 Greenmarket, Dundee DD1 4QB or by telephoning 01382 576700. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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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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