

**Bothkennar Primary School  
and Nursery Class  
Skinflats  
Falkirk Council  
3 June 2008**

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## 1. Background

Bothkennar Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in February 2008 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.

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 chairperson of the Parent Council, 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 Skinflats and the surrounding area in the town of Falkirk. The school is part of the Larbert Integrated Learning Community. At the time of the inspection the roll was 52, including 10 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.

- Progress made in improving the quality of children's experiences in communication and language in the nursery class.
- Commitment of the newly-appointed headteacher and staff to school improvement.

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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.

### **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.

Parents in the nursery class said that they felt welcome in the nursery and that their children enjoyed being at nursery. Parents of pupils in the primary stages were positive about most aspects of school life. They thought that their children enjoyed being in school and that parents' evenings were helpful and informative. Parents felt that they would like a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement. They wanted more information about the standards expected of pupils by school staff. Pupils felt they were treated fairly in school but said that the behaviour of some pupils could be better. All staff liked working in the school and were positive about all aspects of the school.

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

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

The overall quality of the curriculum in the nursery was good, and adequate in the primary stages. In the nursery, children benefited from a broad and balanced range of stimulating learning experiences. However, children did not have enough opportunities to independently develop their own interests. From P1 to P7, the school provided pupils with a broad curriculum, which was enhanced by pupils' participation in visits to places of interest and taking part in competitions. All teachers planned a suitably broad range of learning experiences for pupils but they did not always ensure continuity and progression in the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in all curricular areas. Pupils did not as yet have access to two hours each week of good quality physical education, in line with national recommendations. Additional time had been allocated to the teaching of English language and mathematics but this had yet to have an impact on improving pupils' attainment. Across the school, pupils had regular, effective opportunities to develop skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Overall the quality of teaching in the nursery was good. In the nursery class, most staff interacted well with the children and, in a few activities, questioning was used effectively to extend children's ideas and thinking. The overall quality of teaching across the primary classes was adequate. Most teachers gave clear explanations. The majority made effective use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. In a few lessons, staff had started to share with pupils what they were expected to learn and occasionally they used the end of lessons to review what had been learned. The quality of homework across the school was too variable.

Children in the nursery class were making very good progress in their learning. They were developing investigative skills as they played with magnifying glasses, balancing scales and natural materials. Children were exploring a range of media and textures as they expressed their ideas at an art and craft area. Many enjoyed role play in the shop and imaginatively acted out a variety of roles. They were developing appropriate hand control and coordination skills through regular physical activities. From P1 to P7 the quality of learning was weak. Pupils in the early stages did not have enough opportunities to learn through purposeful play activities. Pupils in P5 to P7 responded

well to the tasks and activities which allowed them to be independent and creative. Across the school, pupils did not have enough planned opportunities to work with others. During too many lessons there were significant periods of time when pupils were not purposefully engaged in learning. Often pupils worked at too slow a pace on unchallenging tasks.

In the nursery, children were forming good relationships with other children and adults. They were developing independence in personal tasks and learning to cooperate with others. From P1 to P7, pupils had good opportunities to develop their skills in wider achievements. The newly-appointed headteacher had recently increased the opportunities for pupils to take responsibility across the school. Pupils were responsible for recycling, litter monitoring and caring for plants. Through working towards their bronze Eco Schools Scotland award, pupils had developed their awareness of sustaining their environment. Pupils from P5 to P7 had recently won an authority award for demonstrating how they could use ICT to assist their learning in a wide range of areas. In conjunction with the active-schools coordinator, pupils had access to a wide range of after-school and lunchtime clubs through which they enhanced their health and wellbeing. Pupils were knowledgeable about healthy eating and understood the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

### **English language**

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in all aspects of communication and language. They listened attentively to adults and other children and were beginning to recognise rhyme whilst listening to stories and poems. They enjoyed looking at fiction and non-fiction books in all play areas of the nursery. Most could recognise their name in print and a few were beginning to make marks and symbols as they played at writing. At the primary stages, the overall quality of improvement in performance in English Language was adequate. In recent years, standards of attainment in reading and in writing had risen slightly. Almost all pupils in the early stages were achieving appropriate national standards in reading and in writing earlier than might normally be expected. However, these early gains were not maintained as pupils progressed through the school. Across the school, most pupils achieved appropriate national levels in reading. By P3, all pupils had achieved these levels in writing. However, by P7 only the majority of pupils were achieving these levels. Pupils receiving additional support were making appropriate progress in their work. The school did not yet have a robust system for assessing and recording pupils' progress in listening and talking. At all stages, most pupils listened well to teachers but lacked skill in listening to each other in groups. Across the school, most pupils displayed confidence in talking to peers and adults. In discussion groups, the older pupils could express their views clearly. Pupils in P7 demonstrated their talking skills effectively in producing short broadcasts for a local radio initiative. By P7, most pupils read fluently and talked with confidence about different authors and about features of books they had read. However, there were important weaknesses in the quality of pupils' writing. As they progressed through the school, pupils had insufficient opportunities to write at length or for a range of purposes. Overall, the standard of spelling, punctuation and presentation of work was not good enough.

## **Mathematics**

In the nursery class, children were making very good progress in early mathematics. They enjoyed playing with numbers and were able to count to five in songs and games. A few could count beyond five. Many were able to sort and solve problems in play situations. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was weak. In recent years, pupils' attainment had declined. All pupils from P1 to P5 were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment but by P7 only a majority of pupils achieved these levels. Pupils at the early stages were achieving levels earlier than might normally be expected but these gains were not maintained as pupils progressed through the school. Across the school, pupils did not have access to sufficient opportunities to consolidate and reinforce concepts and, therefore, most were insecure at their level. Pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress towards meeting their agreed learning targets. By P7, pupils demonstrated accuracy in using graphs to organise, display and interpret information. Most lacked confidence in mental calculations. They did not have a sufficient understanding of decimals, percentages or fractions. Across the school, pupils' knowledge of measurement was not well developed. Pupils had a good knowledge and understanding of the properties of shapes. At all stages, pupils were unable to identify and use a range of strategies to help solve mathematical problems.

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

Meeting children's needs was adequate in the nursery class and weak across the primary stages. Staff in the nursery class knew individual children very well and used this information sensitively to provide an appropriately stimulating and developmentally appropriate range of activities. Staff had begun the process of changing the structure of the session to allow children to persevere with their chosen activity. However, adult led activities were too long and, as a result, some children lost interest and became restless. In the primary stages, teachers provided activities for differing abilities within classes but tasks were not always well matched to pupils' individual learning needs. The pace of learning in the majority of lessons was too slow. Aspects of English language and mathematics were at times too dependent on the use of commercially produced materials. The support for learning teacher provided good assistance to pupils in small groups. However, pupils were withdrawn from class too often for individual tuition and this reduced their opportunity to be included in class activities. The support for learning teacher had created individualised educational programmes to help pupils with additional support needs achieve success and to make progress in their learning. Some pupils did not have their needs identified at an early enough stage in the school. The arrangements for coordinating learning support provision across the school required improvement.

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

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The quality of pastoral care was adequate. Children in the nursery enjoyed healthy snacks and had a developing awareness of good hygiene. All staff in the nursery and primary classes had been involved in training for the protection of children and were aware of their responsibilities to keep children safe. However, the school had not yet established appropriate procedures for ensuring the care, welfare and protection of all pupils. Staff effectively applied the school's procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying. The school had recently reviewed its approach to managing pupil behaviour but this was at an early stage of implementation. All staff dealt sensitively with any incidents of pupil misbehaviour. Arrangements to support the transition of children from nursery to P1 did not focus sufficiently on children's learning experiences. The arrangements for pupils to transfer from P7 to Larbert High School were good.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The quality of accommodation was good. The entrance, though small, was bright and welcoming with a stimulating display of pupils' work. There were good areas for classroom activity as well as additional space within the school library for small group work. The accommodation was shortly to be enhanced by having regular access to the newly-built, attached community hall. ICT was being used increasingly to support learning and teaching. The playground surface area was in need of upgrading. Staff and pupils had begun to develop the outdoor areas for social and learning purposes. The school had appropriate security arrangements in place. Access for users with restricted mobility was appropriate.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	Pupils identified strongly with the school and were proud to be associated with it. All pupils were polite, well behaved, and cooperative with teachers and with each other. Pupil and staff relationships were very good. The school did not have a planned approach to the systematic development of pupils' personal and social skills. Teachers promoted achievement through the regular use of praise and incentives for good work. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' work and attainment were not consistently high. Weekly school assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance, encouraging positive behaviour and celebrating pupils' efforts and achievements. Across the school, approaches to developing pupils' understanding of religious diversity and racial equality were inconsistent.
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	The school had adequate relationships with parents and the local community. The newly-appointed headteacher and the Skinflats action committee were looking at ways to improve the school's links with the community. The recently established Parent Council was supportive and took a keen interest in the work of the school. The school had recently improved its communications with parents through helpful newsletters. Parents were not as yet consulted on sensitive health issues. The school recognised a need to involve parents more in their children's learning.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Bothkennar Primary School had the potential to provide a good quality of education for its pupils. There were a significant number of important issues to be addressed by the newly-appointed headteacher and her staff. Attainment in English language was adequate and in mathematics was weak. The quality of teaching overall was adequate and pupils' learning experiences were weak. Provision for pupils in the nursery class was good. Children in the nursery were making a very good start in developing skills in literacy. At the primary stages, arrangements for supporting pupils with additional support needs required to be improved. Tasks and activities were not well matched to the needs of individual pupils. At P1 to P7, a few pupils had the potential to achieve more if they had been consistently provided with greater pace and challenge.

In her very short time in post, the headteacher had already taken a number of positive steps to improving the school. She was beginning to develop teamwork across the school to improve provision for pupils. She had a clear vision for the school and had

gained the trust of pupils, parents and staff. The school's approaches to self-evaluation were unsatisfactory. Pupils and parents were not involved in evaluating the work of the school. Teachers had not yet used quality indicators developed nationally to carry out an audit of the school's work. The headteacher now needed to ensure that these approaches were implemented rigorously and consistently and were focused on improving learning, and raising pupils' overall levels of attainment. The school would benefit from a more systematic approach to monitoring and tracking pupils' progress, which involves all staff, pupils and parents. The newly-appointed headteacher, with the support of the education authority, had the capacity to take the school forward.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice. At the last integrated inspection of the nursery class there were two recommendations which were still in the process of being addressed.

### **Main points for action**

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

- the quality of the curriculum;
- pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics;
- the quality of learning and teaching;
- arrangements to ensure that the care, welfare and protection of pupils are given a high priority; and
- management, leadership and self-evaluation of the school, to ensure that the needs of all learners in the nursery and primary classes are addressed more effectively.

## **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. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority to monitor progress. They will publish an interim report on progress within one year of the publication of this report. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Sarah Cushley  
HM Inspector

3 June 2008

## 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>	
The curriculum	adequate
Teaching for effective learning	adequate
Learners' experiences	weak
Improvement in performance: English language	adequate
Improvement in performance: mathematics	weak

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

<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Care, welfare and development	adequate
Management and use of resources and space for learning	good
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	adequate
Equality and fairness	adequate
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	adequate

<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Developing people and partnerships	adequate
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	weak
Improvement through self-evaluation	unsatisfactory

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 child in either the nursery class or primary stages was treated fairly.</li> <li>• The school was well led.</li> <li>• The school had a good reputation in the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school could give them clearer information on the standards expected of pupils.</li> <li>• The school could give parents a clearer idea of the schools priorities for improving the education of pupils.</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, expected them to work hard and told them when they had done something well.</li> <li>• Teachers helped keep them stay safe and healthy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</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 showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils' successes were celebrated regularly.</li> <li>• Support staff felt they had good opportunities to be involved in decision making in 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 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, Endeavour House, 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 and Communications Team, 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@sps.org.uk](mailto:ask@sps.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.sps.org.uk](http://www.sps.org.uk).

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