

**Carmuir Primary School
Falkirk Council
15 June 2004**

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1. Background

Carmuir Primary School was inspected in March 2004 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 and the environment for learning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent association (PA) and a group of parents and the pupil council.

The school serves part of the Camelon area of Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the roll was 197, including 23 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

- High quality accommodation and resources, including pupil access to ICT and library books.
- Some very good teaching in P4-P7.
- The careful attention given by all staff to the pastoral care of the pupils.
- The support given by parents, the School Board and the local community.
- The wide range of extra curricular activities.

3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff

The inspection team found that parents and carers were very satisfied with the work of the school and all thought the school was well led. All staff were positive about the school and enjoyed working there. Teaching staff had wanted better communication within the school and support staff wanted more involvement in decision making and expressed concern about the behaviour of some pupils. Pupils were proud of their school but were unhappy about the behaviour of a few pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided pupils with a broad and well balanced curriculum. Staff provided a range of suitable learning activities in all areas of the curriculum. The school grouped pupils working at the same level in P3-P7, for writing and mathematics as an approach to increase teaching time. The school made effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support and enhance pupil's learning across the curriculum, including the presentation of writing and graphs. Where appropriate, staff made good use of visits to places of interest to support pupils' learning in environmental studies. Pupils at P6 and P7 demonstrated a growing vocabulary and confidence in French.

Across the school the quality of interaction between teachers and pupils was good. In most classes instructions and explanations were clear and the purposes of lessons shared with pupils. The pace of learning at the early stages was too variable and pupils faced insufficient challenge. At times instances of inappropriate behaviour were not sufficiently well managed. Questioning was used well, for example in interactive mental maths and science lessons. Staff were developing their skills in offering praise and feedback to pupils and now needed to focus on telling pupils how to improve their work. The quality of teaching was inconsistent across the classes. Some was very effective at P4-P7.

Pupils responded well to opportunities to work together in groups but this experience was limited across the school and children were not sufficiently challenged in thinking for themselves and in independent learning activities. Homework was regular with varied tasks linked to ongoing class work. Pupils were generally motivated and enthusiastic about school life. Across the school pupils were actively involved in practical activities in science and technology. In P4, pupils studied magnets and recorded their findings with confidence. P1 pupils were allocated play activities out with the classroom each week but there was limited opportunity for individual choice or creativity. Pupils had access to a good range of out of school activities, including football, dance, Spanish, home economics and craft, design and technology and these were well attended by senior pupils.

Pupils were increasingly involved in making decisions about aspects of school life and the pupil council was leading a project to promote recycling of paper in the school. At weekly house meetings and assemblies a range of pupils' achievements were celebrated and rewarded. Older pupils eagerly undertook additional responsibilities in the playground leading games and supporting younger children in the dining hall to encourage healthy eating choices and social skills.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was fair. Success in raising attainment across the school was too slow and improvements made had not been sustained. Across the school only a majority of pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in reading and writing. Pupils' progress in classwork at the early stages was too slow. Many pupils listened intently to stories and could listen and talk to each other in groups. Most

were interested in books and used the well-resourced library very well. They read a range of books for pleasure, to find information and had a good understanding of what they had read. Pupils were less skilled at identifying more subtle features of the writer's craft. Across the school, pupils' writing was improving. They wrote widely for a good range of purposes. A number of pupils at the upper stages had written very good factual reports.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was fair from P1-P6 but unsatisfactory at P7. Progress in raising attainment was poor and overall displayed a steady decline. Only a majority of pupils were attaining appropriate national levels. At P7 only a third attained appropriate levels. Pupils with additional support needs were not achieving well enough. Across all stages pupils showed an increasing confidence in mental activities and were able to carry out calculations accurately. Pupils in the middle and upper stages demonstrated a good knowledge of two- and three- dimensional shape and in P7 used ICT effectively to present different types of graphs. Pupils were not confident in using equipment to measure, weigh and find volumes. At all stages pupils needed more opportunities to work together on practical activities in measurement and information handling. Pupils had learned strategies in carrying out problem-solving but too many of these activities were worksheet based.

5. How well are pupils supported?

All staff knew the pupils very well. They provided very good support for their social and emotional development and provided a high level of care. Pupils felt safe and well looked after. The school had very effective procedures for dealing with any aggressive behaviour that occurred and pupils were confident that staff would deal with any problem.

Teachers were aware of the needs of pupils who required additional support in their learning. Support staff worked well at all stages with small groups and individuals. Children with behavioural needs were well supported in class. Early years classes did not have enough support to implement early intervention strategies effectively or to support pupils' learning. The school worked closely with a range of agencies to ensure the needs of individuals were assessed. However, there were too few staff with particular qualifications to meet pupils' needs. Individualised educational programmes (IEPs) were in place for pupils with additional support needs and parents were involved in setting these up and reviewing them. However, review meetings had fallen behind schedule and pupils' learning targets had not been evaluated.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was very good. The school had been fully refurbished and was maintained to a high standard. The school had a modern security system and appropriate access for all pupils and visitors. A lift was available to access the upper floor. Classrooms were bright and well presented and all were equipped with new furniture and storage facilities. The open-plan area offered a stimulating learning environment for ICT, play and group work. An extra classroom was used for expressive arts activities and the after-school club. Good quality art work was displayed around the school to demonstrate skills achieved. The pleasant dining area and the healthy options available promoted healthy eating as a social activity.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. The janitor and support staff made a strong contribution to the life of the school in their daily work and in leading extra curricular activities. Staff worked well together to create an environment in which pupils felt safe and valued. Pupils, parents and staff were proud to be associated with the school. Relationships between staff and pupils were good. The overall behaviour of pupils was good but some displayed frustration and anger in the playground and in the classroom. They needed additional support to manage their behaviour and be aware of the needs and feelings of others. The school chaplain provided good support to the school to assist with religious observance and the whole school visited the local church each term. The school celebrated diversity with a week of European activities and through fund raising for local and national charities. Levels of expectation in improving pupils' work were not sufficiently high across the school.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school's partnership with parents and the local community was very effective. Communication with parents, including regular newsletters and telephone contact, was very good. Parent helpers assisted staff and pupils in a range of ways in classes and in the library. The School Board and headteacher worked effectively together. The parents' association was active in fund raising for the school and organised well attended social events. Parents had been consulted on anti-bullying policies and some attended regular curriculum sharing evenings. Most parents attended annual meetings to discuss their child's progress. Teachers worked closely with Falkirk High School in planning and providing extra curricular activities and in transition arrangements from P7- S1. School events featured regularly in the local media.

7. Improving the school

Carmuir's Primary School was well placed to improve. The headteacher was committed to the school and its ongoing improvement. She was well supported by staff and parents. There were some examples of very good teaching. Staff ensured that all pupils were given equal opportunities to access all areas of the curriculum. Pupils felt secure and confident in an environment in which their well-being was a high priority. Teachers now needed to focus on improving learning and teaching to raise attainment.

The headteacher provided good leadership. She was well respected by parents, staff and pupils and had a high profile within the school and local community. She had worked with the local authority to ensure improvements to the accommodation and had guided the creation of a vibrant and stimulating environment. She recognised the need to ensure effective communication with all teaching staff and review deployment of skilled teachers. She now needed to focus on improving achievement. The principal teacher supported the headteacher effectively. Her teaching was a model of good practice. Her leadership of developments in providing quality feedback to pupils' work and ICT was impacting positively on learning and teaching.

The school had good arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its work. Promoted staff monitored teachers' plans, sampled pupils' work and visited classrooms to observe curricular areas. However, feedback to staff was limited and needed to focus more specifically on next steps for pupils' learning and teaching and how to improve pupils' attainment. The school had made good progress in creating an environment for learning and it should now focus on raising expectations, achievement and attainment.

The school and education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the school and to raise achievements for all its pupils. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve attainment in English language and mathematics;
- improve learning and teaching to a consistently high standard across the school;
- raise expectations to challenge pupils to produce higher standards; and
- develop more effective approaches to meeting pupils' needs.

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 and carers. 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 a report to parents and carers, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Susan R Duff
HM Inspector

15 June 2004

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Accommodation and facilities
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Climate and relationships
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be fair

- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Expectations and promoting achievement

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school had a good reputation in the community. • School reports were helpful and informative. • The quality of the accommodation. • They were made to feel welcome in the school. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, parents had no significant concerns about the work of the school.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers supported them with their learning. • They felt safe and well looked after in the school. • They had a say in deciding how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of other pupils. • The amount of homework given.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They liked working in the school. • The school was well led. • They showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • Pupil success was celebrated. • Teachers set high standards for pupil attainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher staff would like improved communication between senior managers and staff. • Some support staff would like to be more involved in decision making.

How can you contact us?

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, G1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8079. Copies are also available on our website: www.hmie.gov.uk.

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