

**Head of Muir Primary School
and Nursery Class
Denny
Falkirk Council
4 September 2007**

| Contents | Page |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Background | 1 |
| 2. Key strengths | 1 |
| 3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff? | 1 |
| 4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement? | 2 |
| 5. How well are pupils' learning needs met? | 4 |
| 6. How good is the environment for learning? | 5 |
| 7. Leading and improving the school | 7 |
| Appendix 1 Indicators of quality | 9 |
| Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses | 10 |
| How can you contact us? | 12 |

1. Background

Head of Muir 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.

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 met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents.¹

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 southern area of the town of Denny and the village of Dennyloanhead. At the time of the inspection the roll was 355, including 60 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Courteous and well-behaved nursery children and pupils who were well behaved and keen to learn.
- The quality of pastoral care provided for all pupils.
- Pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT).
- High quality teamwork amongst staff and their commitment to all pupils.
- Leadership of the headteacher and his ability to inspire staff and 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.

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

Parents of nursery children were satisfied with the quality of education and care provided for children. They felt staff knew their children well and responded appropriately to their individual needs. Parents with children in classes P1 to P7 were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. Their children enjoyed being at school and were well looked after. The school communicated with them regularly and responded promptly to matters of concern. They felt that very effective leadership was bringing about major changes and was improving the school. Pupils were happy about most aspects of the school. They appreciated the efforts of their teachers in keeping them safe and improving their learning. A small number had concerns about poor behaviour of a few pupils. Teaching staff were very positive about all aspects of the school. They enjoyed working in the school and felt well supported by the senior management team. Around half of the support staff felt they were not fully involved in decision making and that there was not mutual respect between pupils and themselves.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school's curriculum took good account of national and local authority guidelines. Visiting staff in expressive arts were enhancing the development of pupils' skills. Nursery staff planned a broad curriculum across the key aspects of children's development and learning. However, the range of activities provided did not always offer sufficient challenge for all children in the nursery. Some needed to be encouraged and supported by staff to make decisions and persevere with tasks. The further development of shared, activity based learning, including high quality play experiences across the nursery to P3 would improve the consistency and challenge in the early years. Primary staff used flexible time well to give additional time to English language and mathematics to help raise pupils' attainment. An appropriate emphasis on pupils' personal and social development included health education and education for citizenship. Pupils were not yet receiving two hours of physical education (PE) each week. Pupils in P6 and P7 were acquiring good conversational skills in French. Staff had successfully integrated ICT into pupils' curricular experiences. Interactions between pupils and teachers were very positive. The overall quality of teaching across the school was very good. Teachers provided clear explanations and instructions and built well on previous lessons. They almost always shared the purposes of lessons with pupils and gave them helpful feedback on how to improve their work. Teachers used praise and rewards effectively to encourage pupils to work hard. They also used written comments appropriately in classwork and in personal learning planning to identify pupils' strengths and areas for improvement. Arrangements for assessing, tracking and monitoring pupils' progress were effective. Homework was regular but lacking in variety and degree of challenge for many of the pupils.

The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences was very good. Children in the nursery were happy and settled and were familiar with the nursery rules and routines. They cooperated well with one another and were able to share and take turns. Some children needed to be encouraged by staff to develop their independence and think more for themselves. Most children used the computer and interactive whiteboard with confidence and had grown and cultivated plants in the outdoor area. Some confidently

acted out different roles in the imaginative area. All children enjoyed painting pictures and were able to select materials for creative collages. However, they did not have enough opportunities to dance and make their own music using simple percussion instruments. In the outdoor area, children were energetic in their play and were gaining an awareness of space and safe practices in physical activity. The range of equipment available did not challenge more able children or provide progression in physical skills. Primary pupils were actively engaged in their learning and carried out a variety of tasks with enthusiasm. They worked well together in pairs and in groups. Across the school, pupils were making a good start to setting and evaluating their own targets for learning. At all stages, pupils were learning appropriate skills in art and design and music. At the early stages, whilst pupils enjoyed using purposeful play for learning and practising their skills in English language and mathematics, they would benefit from more opportunities to do so. Pupils were developing very good skills in the use of ICT in their learning. For example, pupils from P1 to P7 practised and developed literacy and numeracy skills using both computers and interactive whiteboards. At P4 and P5 pupils showed a good understanding of the Egyptians. Pupils at P6 and P7 were able to talk about evacuees during World War 2. At P5, pupils participated confidently in debates about Wind Farms and Pocket Money.

The school had taken very good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. In both the nursery and the primary department pupils were making very good progress in developing their confidence and self-esteem. The school valued and celebrated pupils' wider achievements in a variety of ways. Weekly assemblies allowed pupils to share with the school community their academic and sporting successes. Silver and Gold Star awards recognised pupils' good work and positive behaviour. Postcards were sent home to parent's to inform them of the school's pride in their child's achievements. Attractive displays of pupils' art and design work reflected their high levels of attainment in this curricular area. Elected representatives from P4 to P7 exercised responsibilities through the pupil council and the eco committee. Senior pupils successfully supported the youngest pupils in the playground and through a paired reading project. All pupils were improving further their enterprise skills by raising funds for local and international charities. At P7, pupils were knowledgeable about the benefits of Fair Trade products. The school was working towards recognition as a Health Promoting School and most pupils had a good understanding about nutrition.

English language

In the nursery, children were making good progress in communication and language. They were confident when talking to adults and to one another. At welcome time, they shared news and talked about the weather. They listened well to instructions and stories and most children used the book corner to read and use books to find information. Most were able to recognise the shape and sound of familiar letters and older children were able to write their own name. However, there were too few opportunities for children to use language for a wide range of purposes and to engage in extended conversations in small groups. The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Attainment across the primary stages had shown improvement in recent years. Almost all pupils, including those with additional support needs, made good or very good progress in their classwork and were attaining appropriate national levels. Some were capable of achieving these levels earlier. Throughout the school, pupils listened well to adults and to each other and responded with

confidence. At P3, pupils discussed their work on floating and sinking. Pupils' skills in listening and talking at some stages needed to be further developed. At P3, pupils read fluently, with understanding and were able to discuss the author and illustrator. At P7, pupils were able to use the Dewey system in the school library. They also demonstrated an understanding of genre and of the writer's use of descriptive language. Across the school, pupils displayed an enthusiasm for reading. All pupils enjoyed using the attractive and well-resourced school library. In the early years, pupils required more challenge in their writing. As they progressed through the school there was evidence of high quality pieces of extended writing. Pupils knew how to improve their writing. The standard of presentation of work of most pupils was good although some required to take more care. Pupils made good use of ICT for a variety of purposes when working on their language skills.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery were making good progress in early mathematics. All children in the nursery were able to count to ten confidently and could recognise and name simple shapes. Most children could sort and match objects by shape and colour. They were developing a good understanding of simple mathematical processes and language. They were able to measure and weigh ingredients when making dough and during baking activities. Opportunities to solve simple mathematical problems during play were too limited. Across the primary stages, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Standards of attainment had improved in recent years at the middle stages, but had remained fairly constant at the early and upper stages. Most pupils, including those with additional support needs, were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. Whilst most pupils coped well with their classwork, a few were capable of tackling more challenging tasks and working at a brisker pace. At all stages, most pupils could confidently interpret information from a range of graphs and charts. Most were competent in using databases and spreadsheets. Whilst pupils at the early stages were making a very good start to their early number work they were capable of achieving more. Most pupils at all stages had good skills in written and mental calculation and were able to explain clearly the methods they used to achieve their answers. At all stages, pupils had a sound understanding of appropriate properties of shapes, position and movement, including symmetry. Most pupils were making good progress in developing skills in problem-solving and enquiry. They were able to understand and solve a wide range of types of mathematical problem and could explain the strategies they had used to arrive at conclusions.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's arrangements to support nursery children's and primary pupils' learning were very good. Staff in the nursery regularly observed children and noted their responses to play activities. They used this information to plan for children's learning. Some activities did not provide sufficient challenge for older and more able children. Assessment documents and folios of children's work provided good information about children's progress and development. In the primary classes, teachers used a range of strategies to identify pupils' learning needs and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Tasks and activities were mostly well chosen to meet the needs of all pupils. Teachers organised ability groups to provide work at appropriate levels in English language and mathematics. Individual pupils received good support from class teachers, senior managers, the visiting

learning support teacher and pupil support assistants. Teachers received helpful advice and good support from the visiting learning support teacher and senior managers. The school had developed individualised educational programmes for a number of pupils with additional support needs. Staff set clearly stated learning targets, reviewed pupils' progress regularly and held regular meetings with parents to discuss progress.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

| Aspect | Comment |
|---------------|---|
| Pastoral care | The school provided pupils with a very good level of pastoral support. Nursery staff supported children appropriately according to their age, ability and confidence. Children and pupils felt safe and well looked after and felt that staff listened to any concerns they might have. All staff put a high priority on pupils' care and welfare, and had a good knowledge of the education authority's child protection policies. Appropriate arrangements were in place for the administration and issue of medicines. They dealt well with incidents concerning pupils' behaviour, including bullying, or health and safety. Pupils' personal and social education covered important aspects of healthy and safe living, including personal safety, relationships and substance misuse. Pupils' access to the internet was controlled appropriately. Teachers actively promoted healthy lifestyles with pupils. Staff were addressing nutrition issues successfully within a whole-school approach which included the introduction of healthy choices in the dining room and the promotion of healthy eating habits. The school had effective arrangements to support pupils making the transition from the nursery classes into P1 and from P7 into Denny High school. |

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| Quality of accommodation and facilities | <p>The quality of the accommodation and facilities was very good. Nursery staff made good use of the indoor and outdoor space to enhance children’s learning. All staff made good use of attractive displays to enhance the learning environment. Classrooms were large, bright and well equipped with interactive whiteboards. Additional strengths included the neighbouring playing fields, combined games hall and dining room, ICT suite and library. The school had made very good use of available space to support pupils and welcome parents, with a ‘calm’ room for vulnerable pupils and groups. The school benefited from extensive and well-planned grounds including grass and tarmac play areas. However, the sports area behind the school was unsafe for pupil use due to the uneven surface and lack of maintenance. There were appropriate entrance security arrangements. The school was fully accessible to users with restricted mobility. Most pupil toilets were well maintained but a number needed to be upgraded. There was no barrier separating the staff car park from the playground area.</p> |
| Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality | <p>There was an outstanding sense of community and the very positive and supportive interaction between all staff and pupils was a particular strength of the school. Staff in the nursery had created an environment where children and parents were made to feel very welcome. Staff praised children appropriately to acknowledge their efforts and achievements and to build self-esteem. Teachers were highly successful in developing pupils’ positive attitudes, tolerance and respect for each other. All staff contributed fully to the excellent ethos of the school. The school effectively celebrated pupils’ achievements in well-presented displays of their work and in frequent and high quality newsletters to parents. Expectations for work and behaviour were clear. Staff were fully committed to ensuring all pupils achieved their full potential. An effective racial equality policy was in place and education authority procedures were implemented. Weekly and termly assemblies provided very good opportunities for religious observance and to celebrate pupils’ achievements.</p> |

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| Partnership with parents and the community | The school had very good links with parents and the local community. In the nursery, parents frequently helped staff in the playroom and were encouraged to be involved in their children's learning. Relationships between nursery staff and families were very good. Very good opportunities were available for parents and staff to formally and informally discuss their children's progress. Primary parents were welcomed at the school and were kept well informed about the life and work of the school. They received regular and informative reports on pupils' progress. Parents' views had been sought and the school had responded positively to their views. The School Board and the PTA provided active support. The school nurse, integrated learning community family support worker and the community policeman contributed effectively to the work of the school. Parents of P1 pupils were given very helpful advice prior to their child's entry to the school. Parents had appropriate opportunities to view resources used for sensitive issues in health education. The school had established effective links with local businesses. |

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Head of Muir Primary School provided pupils with a secure, well-ordered and friendly learning environment within which staff put a high priority on pupils' care and welfare. In the nursery, learning experiences were good and met most children's needs although some children needed to be more challenged in their learning. Primary pupils were happy, motivated and very well behaved. The overall quality of learning and teaching was very good. The good attainment in English language and mathematics still left headroom to improve further. Pupils enjoyed their learning and accessed a range of activities which successfully promoted their personal and social development. Staff provided very effective support for those pupils requiring additional assistance in their learning. Relationships with parents and the community were very good.

The headteacher had been in post for just over two years. He provided very good leadership for the school. He had shown consistent commitment, professional expertise and care in managing and improving the school. He had developed positive relationships with pupils, parents, and staff and had gained their respect. He recognised the talents, interests and development needs of all staff and supported them in their endeavours. The senior management team consisted of an experienced deputy headteacher and two newly appointed principal teachers. The deputy headteacher had responsibility for the nursery class and she formally monitored playroom practice. Whilst the team provided good support to the headteacher, he recognised the need to

review their remits to ensure their effective deployment in developing the curriculum and further improving whole school attainment. Staff in the nursery were aware of their responsibilities and implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Code of Practice. The headteacher had put in place effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of both the nursery and the primary department. He had consulted parents on aspects of the work of the whole school and taken good account of their views. He involved staff in evaluating the quality of the provision and in identifying areas for development. An audit had been conducted and areas for improvement were identified within the development plan. All staff showed commitment to taking these forward. The school had a considerable number of strengths and was well placed to continue to improve.

Recommendations from the last Care Commission singleton inspection had been actioned appropriately.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- ensure that all nursery children are appropriately challenged in their learning;
- continue to encourage the development of pupil-led incentives to support healthy eating in school;
- continue to improve attainment in English language and mathematics; and
- continue to review the roles of the senior management team to focus more clearly on developing the curriculum and raising attainment.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, 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.

David M Martin
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.

| How good are learning, teaching and achievement? | |
|---|-----------|
| Structure of the curriculum | very good |
| The teaching process | very good |
| Pupils' learning experiences | very good |
| Pupils' attainment in English language | good |
| Pupils' attainment in mathematics | good |

| How well are pupils' learning needs met? | |
|---|-----------|
| Meeting pupils' needs | very good |

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

| Leading and improving the school | |
|---|-----------|
| 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.

| What parents thought the school did well | What parents think the school could do better |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly. • Staff showed concern for children's care and welfare. • They received helpful information about their children's progress. • They were made to feel welcome and were consulted on decisions which affected their child. • The school was well led and if they raised a matter of concern it would be dealt with. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues. |
| What pupils thought the school did well | What pupils think the school could do better |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers encouraged them and helped them when they had difficulties. • The school helped to keep them safe and healthy. • Pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better. • Teachers expected them to work hard and were good at letting them know how they could improve their learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had concerns about some pupils' behaviour. |

| What staff thought the school did well | What staff think the school could do better |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well led. • There was good communication between senior managers and staff. • The school worked hard to promote good relations with the community. • They had good opportunities to be involved in decision making. • Continuous professional development was effective. • They liked working in the school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff had no significant issues. • Around half of the ancillary staff felt they were not fully involved in decision making; and that there was not mutual respect between pupils and themselves. |

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, 1st Floor, Endeavour House, 1 Greenmarket, Dundee DD1 4QB or by telephoning 01382 576700. Copies are also available on our website 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 HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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 our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at 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. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

Crown Copyright 2007

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.