

**Blackness Primary School  
Linlithgow  
Falkirk Council  
12 October 2004**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Key strengths</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5. How well are pupils supported?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6. How good is the environment for learning?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7. Improving the school</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Indicators of quality</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>How can you contact us?</b>	<b>10</b>

## **1. Background**

Blackness Primary School was inspected in May/June 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 to 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-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents.

The school serves the village of Blackness and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 34. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The very effective leadership of the headteacher.
- The commitment shown by all staff in establishing a supportive, welcoming and inclusive ethos with effective pastoral care.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching and the quality of support given to pupils having difficulty with their learning.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics and in talking and listening in English language.
- Pupils' behaviour, the manner in which they co-operated and supported each other, and their positive attitudes to learning.
- The school's well developed partnerships with parents and the local community.

## **3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff**

Parents and carers, pupils and staff were very positive about the school. All parents thought that the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. They

felt that staff made them feel welcome in the school and that they showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. All pupils enjoyed being at school. They felt well supported and looked after, and thought that staff knew them well. All staff liked working in the school. They were happy with communications and relationships. While all parents felt that teachers were good at letting them know about their child's progress, about a third of parents were not pleased with the reporting style used in the school's new report card format.

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

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

The school's curriculum was broad and balanced. Teachers provided pupils with a range of well-planned learning opportunities. They gave additional time to the development of pupils' literacy skills at the early stages and provided good opportunities for pupils to use their talking and listening skills across the curriculum. Teachers had not yet fully developed programmes for information and communications technology to support pupils' learning across the curriculum and for enterprise education. The school was currently reviewing its programmes for science and technology in order to develop pupils' learning more systematically. The quality of teaching had many strengths. Interactions between pupils and teachers were very positive. Teachers shared with pupils what they expected them to learn from their lessons. They gave clear explanations and used questioning very well to determine pupils' understanding and to encourage them to explain their answers. They made very good use of praise to build pupils' self-esteem and provided constructive feedback on pupils' work to let them know how to improve. Teachers made effective use of a range of homework to support or extend pupils' learning.

Pupils were very well behaved and hardworking. They showed a very positive attitude to their learning and worked well in an independent manner when not being directly taught. They responded enthusiastically to many opportunities to be actively engaged in their learning. For example, they listened attentively and contributed to class and group discussions, and co-operated very well together on practical tasks including science investigations and drama activities. Overall, pupils benefited from the lively pace set by teachers, the opportunities to work together, and the wide range of learning activities provided.

Across the school pupils were making steady progress towards developing self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils demonstrated a caring attitude to others with older pupils carrying out their range of responsibilities for supporting younger pupils very well. At P5, pupils successfully organised playground games for other pupils as part of a 'Play Zone' initiative. Pupils were developing aspects of citizenship, including an awareness of environmental issues. All pupils participated in the pupil council and had made positive suggestions for improving the school. They were involved in a recycling initiative which had resulted in the school achieving a bronze award in the national Eco-Schools programme. Pupils also helped to maintain the school wildlife garden and local beach area. A group of pupils had achieved a national technology award. Pupil's successful involvement with the local community and with

former pupils of the school in the school's centenary celebrations this session contributed very well to their overall development of personal and social skills.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English Language was good. There had been very good progress in raising attainment in reading, writing, talking and listening this year. Lower attaining pupils were making good progress in their classwork. Early language skills were well developed among pupils at P1 and P2. Pupils throughout the school listened attentively and responded well to teachers' explanations and instructions and to each other. Discussion skills were very good and pupils were articulate and confident. They made very good use of planned opportunities to talk in pairs, groups and in class. Pupils read regularly for pleasure and could talk in detail about the different types of books they had read. They read fluently and demonstrated good understanding of the text, especially from P4 to P7. Teachers needed to develop further opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to read for information. Imaginative writing was of a high standard and pupils enjoyed the writing experience. Pupils were less skilled in extended personal and functional writing. At all stages, standards of handwriting and presentation were good.

### **Mathematics**

The quality of attainment in mathematics was very good overall. There had been a very good recent upward trend in overall attainment. Across the school, pupils coped very well with their coursework and achieved high standards. Overall, they were making very good progress in working with number, money and measurement. Pupils who were experiencing difficulties with aspects of their number work were well supported by staff and were making good progress. Pupils displayed effective skills in mental calculation, and in written calculation which was very well presented. Pupils' knowledge of the properties of shapes was well developed. At P6 and P7, pupils were able to handle information effectively, including constructing and interpreting different types of graphs. However, pupils' skills in using computers to extend and enrich their experiences in mathematics were not sufficiently developed. When given the opportunity, they applied their mathematical skills successfully in real life situations. Overall, pupils were confident in discussing strategies used when they undertook problem-solving and enquiry tasks.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The school's arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils were very good. Staff knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to their emotional, physical and social needs. They were clear about their responsibilities and were fully aware of the school's care and welfare policies including child protection. They used appropriate strategies to successfully promote positive behaviour. Pupils were very positive about how well staff supported and cared for them. They showed confidence and co-operation in their relationships with adults and with each other. The school was effectively developing its approach to health promotion through providing fresh drinking water, daily fresh fruit and healthy choices at lunchtime.

The school's arrangements for supporting pupils' learning were very good. Overall, teachers matched resources and learning and teaching approaches very effectively to pupils' varying needs. Classroom teachers, the special educational needs assistant, the classroom assistant and the visiting support for learning teacher worked well as a team in identifying and assisting pupils with additional support needs, including higher-attaining pupils. Pupils with an individualised educational programme were making good progress in achieving their learning targets. The school had correctly identified the need to further improve on the quality of these targets and to involve parents more regularly in the process. The arrangements to support pupils at the points of transfer from the nursery to the P1 class and from P7 to the secondary school were well structured and effective overall.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation was good. Classrooms were bright and well furnished and staff made very effective use of the available space. Staff used well presented displays of pupils' work to enhance the learning environment. They had created a well-equipped library and an attractive social area for older pupils. The well designed playground area had been developed to provide very good facilities for both pupils' learning and recreation. The school used the adjacent village hall for assemblies and lunches. It was also used for a restricted range of physical education activities. The school needed improved storage facilities to allow staff suitable access to all resources. Safety issues in relation to the sunken drains in the playground and unguarded heaters in the village hall were drawn to the attention of the headteacher. The school planned to improve the overall safety of pupils in relation to parents bringing their cars into the playground when collecting pupils from the school.</p>

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The atmosphere in the school was very friendly and welcoming. Parents, pupils and staff identified strongly and positively with the school. All staff, including support staff, were committed to the school and its pupils. Relationships among staff and pupils were of a very high standard. Throughout the school, pupils were very well-behaved, friendly and polite. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement. The school had developed a strong sense of equality and fairness in its day-to-day activities. It had been successful in promoting an inclusive approach through encouraging all pupils to become actively involved in the life of the school. Regular assemblies provided good opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements and for religious observance.</p>
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The headteacher had established a strong partnership with parents. The School Board and the Parent Teacher Association provided a very good level of support to the school. The headteacher had put in place clear and regular channels of communication with parents, seeking their views and successfully encouraging them to be actively involved in the life of the school. Regular newsletters, open days, pupils' work sent home for comment and the detailed information given at parents' evenings helped to keep parents very well informed. The school was reviewing its reporting style in report cards in response to parental comments. The school provided very good support and guidance for parents of pupils entering P1. It had well developed links with members of the local community including the school chaplain who supported the school very well.</p>

## 7. Improving the school

In her 15 months in post the headteacher had brought energetic leadership and a strong sense of commitment to improving the school. She had established a very caring, inclusive and supportive environment for learning. Teaching and learning were very good. Pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good overall and attainment in reading, writing, talking and listening had steadily improved. The headteacher had gained the respect and confidence of pupils, parents and staff.

The school had well developed approaches to improvement. Through the headteacher's open and consultative style of management, staff had been fully involved

as a team in taking forward a programme of improvements in the curriculum, ethos and partnership with parents. However, the school now needed to review its ambitious development plan to set a more realistic timescale for the range of priorities for improvement identified. All staff were fully involved in a broad evaluation of the work of the school using quality indicators. The headteacher reviewed teachers' plans, sampled pupils' work and had made a start to monitoring classroom practice to focus on the breadth of pupils' learning experiences. Along with class teachers, she rigorously tracked progress of pupils in English language and mathematics and ensured well-targeted support for pupils. The headteacher and staff were now very well placed to continue to take the school forward through further development of aspects of the curriculum and self evaluation.

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:

- continue to improve the quality of pupils' extended personal and functional writing and reading for information in English language, and make more regular use of information and communications technology across the curriculum;
- continue to develop systematic procedures to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, and plan for developments of identified priorities within a more realistic timescale; and
- address the accommodation and safety issues raised in this report.

### **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 and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Bobby Hogg  
HM Inspector

12 October 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

### **We judged the following to be very good**

- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community
- Leadership

### **We judged the following to be good**

- Structure of the curriculum
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Accommodation and facilities
- Self-evaluation

### **We judged the following to be fair**

- No aspects were found to be in this category

### **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.

<b>What pleased parents and carers most</b>	<b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children enjoyed school, were treated fairly, and found work stimulating and challenging.</li> <li>• The school was well led, had a good reputation in the community and set high standards of achievement for pupils.</li> <li>• Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children, responded well to concerns and dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour.</li> <li>• Teachers were good at letting them know their child's strengths and weaknesses and parents' evenings were helpful and informative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reporting style used in the new school reports.</li> </ul>
<b>What pleased pupils most</b>	<b>What pupils would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils enjoyed school and thought that it helped them to keep themselves safe and healthy.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work hard, helped them when they were having difficulties with their class work and let them know how to improve.</li> <li>• Pupils were treated fairly, behaviour was good and the school was good at dealing with bullying (not personalising).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no specific issues raised by pupils.</li> </ul>

<b>What pleased staff most</b>	<b>What staff would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff enjoyed working in the school, felt that there was effective communication between senior management and staff, and that the school was well led.</li> <li>• They had good opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process.</li> <li>• They felt that the school set high standards for pupils' attainment and celebrated their success.</li> <li>• They thought that staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils and that the school dealt effectively with any instances of indiscipline or bullying.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no specific issues raised by staff.</li> </ul>

## **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 8437. Copies are also available on our website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Professor Alice Brown  
The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman  
4 Melville Street  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7NS

Telephone number: 0870 011 5378  
e-mail: [enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk)

More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website:  
[www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)

Crown Copyright 2004

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.