

**Balnain Primary School
The Highland Council
28 March 2006**

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1. Background

Balnain Primary School was inspected in January 2006 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, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the village of Balnain, near Drumnadrochit, and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 32. The school had been led by a series of six headteachers or acting headteachers within the last five years. The present headteacher had been in post since June 2005. 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.

- Pupils' high standards of behaviour and enthusiasm for learning.
- Some examples of high quality imaginative writing.
- The quality of relationships between pupils and all staff.

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, pupils and staff were very positive about the school's work. Parents thought that the school had a positive climate and that staff were friendly and supportive. They felt that the school had a good reputation in the community. A few parents expressed concerns about the repeated changes of headteacher in recent years and about the condition of the building used by P1-P3 pupils. Pupils enjoyed being in school and felt

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

safe while there. They thought that staff knew them well and listened effectively to their views. All staff enjoyed working in the school and thought that pupils were polite and well behaved. Staff felt that the frequent changes of leadership had disrupted the work of the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The structure of the school's curriculum was adequate. Staff provided pupils with good opportunities to develop an appropriate range of knowledge, understanding and skills in most areas. The curriculum was not sufficiently well structured in a few areas. These included aspects of health education and the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Teachers used an appropriate range of teaching approaches, including working with the whole class, small groups and individuals. They mostly gave clear explanations and used praise well to encourage pupils. Teachers set regular and helpful homework. They did not always use questions effectively to ensure that pupils had understood what had been taught.

All pupils were very well motivated, keen to learn, and worked well without direct supervision. They cooperated effectively on a range of activities, including writing tasks, whole-class discussions and working in small groups in environmental studies. Pupils' skills in using ICT were not sufficiently well developed in a range of areas. These included using computers for research and for handling information in databases. In a few lessons, the pace of pupils' work was too slow and the tasks were not sufficiently challenging for all pupils.

School staff promoted effectively pupils' personal and social development through a range of appropriate activities. These included visits to places of local interest such as Eden Court Theatre, and structured classroom discussions. From the early stages, pupils were improving their awareness of what it means to be a good citizen through participating in the pupil council. A few pupils at the upper stages had improved their skills in music and drama through performing in a school production with Scottish Opera. Pupils were learning to consider the needs of others through activities to raise funds for a number of charities. The school's range of health education activities ensured that pupils had a good knowledge of the importance of a healthy diet. They were aware of the dangers of substance misuse, but did not yet have an appropriate knowledge of personal relationships. Pupils benefited from regular lessons from a visiting physical education specialist teacher and from the Active Schools Co-ordinator to help promote their physical fitness.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Throughout the school, most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. For a few pupils, the pace of progress was too slow. At all stages, most pupils listened attentively to instructions and information. Most talked confidently in class and their skills in discussing in small groups were developing well. At all stages, most pupils read fluently and understood what they had read. At the

middle and upper stages, most used reference books well to find information. A few pupils did not show sufficient awareness of how writers achieve their effects. Throughout the school, most pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes. A few pupils wrote very effective pieces, including lively accounts of activities they had undertaken and imaginative stories.

Mathematics

The quality of attainment in mathematics was adequate. Most pupils at all stages were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. For a few pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Most pupils could interpret information from an appropriate range of graphs. At all stages, almost all carried out written calculations accurately and most performed mental calculations effectively. Pupils at the upper stages were not confident in dealing with decimals and their understanding of angles was not well developed. At all stages, pupils had a good understanding of the properties of a range of shapes. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry required considerable improvement. Too many pupils were not aware of strategies they could use to tackle mathematical problems and could not solve problems effectively.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were good overall. Almost all staff had received appropriate training in child protection procedures. Staff knew their pupils well as individuals. Pupils responded well to staff's care and showed appropriate concern for each other. The headteacher had recently devised an effective system for recording incidents or complaints and noting action taken, and had clear plans to improve this further. School staff made effective use of a range of welfare policies provided by the education authority, including those for race equality and child protection. Early stages pupils were left unsupervised in the playground during the lunch period, when older pupils returned to their classes. The school and education authority should carry out a risk assessment on these arrangements.

Class teachers, with the support of the classroom assistant, gave useful help to groups of pupils and individuals. Teachers matched tasks well to most pupils' learning needs but did not always take appropriate account of pupils' prior learning. As a result, tasks for higher-attaining pupils too often lacked appropriate challenge. The support for learning auxiliary provided valuable support at all stages, through assisting with a range of activities. Her work was not managed well enough to ensure that support was appropriately focused on those pupils who needed it most. The school had effective arrangements to support pupils entering P1 and those transferring to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation was weak. The main building was clean and well maintained and resources were organised effectively. Classrooms were of appropriate size and attractively decorated with displays of pupils' work. There was no suitable access to the P1-P3 building for pupils with physical disabilities. Aspects of building security arrangements required improvement. The roof in the P1-P3 building leaked and toilet and cloakroom facilities were cramped and inadequate. Pupils at all stages could not access the Internet effectively as connections were not sufficiently reliable.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a positive climate and relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Almost all pupils were very well behaved, friendly and courteous. Staff morale had been low, largely as a result of the repeated changes of leadership. It was now improving and most staff worked well together. All staff treated pupils equally and fairly. Teachers did not yet give appropriate attention to racial equality issues to prepare pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society. The school's helpful system of awards encouraged pupils and recognised their achievements. Staff had suitably high expectations of pupils' behaviour, but did not have consistently appropriate expectations of what pupils could achieve. Staff, with the assistance of local chaplains, provided pupils with appropriately frequent opportunities for religious observance.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had good partnerships with parents and the wider community. The School Board and PTA gave valuable support to the work of the school. Pupils benefited from the school's helpful links with the wider community. These included links with other local schools, the school chaplains, local police and the school nurse. Parents had recently been consulted about the school's work on health issues related to smoking. The school planned to use a similar approach when introducing work on personal relationships. The school kept parents well informed through regular newsletters, frequent notes regarding pupils' class work, an open afternoon, parents' evenings and yearly</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	written reports on pupils' progress. The school handbook for parents did not give enough information about the work of the school.

7. Improving the school

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

Balnain Primary School had a number of strengths. Pupils were happy in school, very well motivated and worked enthusiastically. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Pupils were achieving good standards in English language and adequate standards in mathematics. A few pupils could achieve more, if staff provided greater pace and challenge.

Leadership in the school was adequate. In the five years prior to the appointment of the headteacher, a number of headteachers and acting headteachers had been engaged. This lack of continuity in the strategic leadership of the school had limited the school's capacity to improve. In her brief time in post the headteacher had improved aspects of the school's work. These included organising classroom resources more effectively and improving pupils' writing skills. She was caring and committed and had been successful in gaining the trust and respect of parents and pupils. The headteacher had recently visited classrooms to observe the quality of learning and teaching. She sampled pupils' work and provided teachers with written feedback on their plans for pupils' learning. These arrangements were not yet sufficiently systematic and rigorous to have had a significant impact on classroom practice. School staff had not always made effective use of assessment information, including the results of National Assessments, to track pupils' progress. As a result, a few pupils had not made sufficient progress in their learning. Overall, the school's arrangements for evaluating its work were weak. With the continuing support and assistance of the education authority, the headteacher had the capacity to improve the school.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve the quality of learning and teaching, quality assurance, and meeting pupils' needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve attainment in mathematics;

- improve arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's provision to ensure that all pupils' needs are met more effectively; and
- improve the quality of the accommodation.

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.

Robert D Barfoot
HM Inspector

28 March 2006

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	Adequate
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Good
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Adequate

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Good
Meeting pupils' needs	Adequate

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	Weak
Climate and relationships	Good
Expectations and promoting achievement	Good
Equality and fairness	Good
Partnership with parents the School Board, and the community	Good

Improving the school	
Leadership	Adequate
Self-evaluation	Weak

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	excellent
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. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School reports gave parents helpful information about their children's progress.• The school had a good reputation in the local community and was well led.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few parents thought that the school buildings were not kept in good order.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers knew pupils well and helped them when they were having difficulties with their school work.• Teachers helped pupils to keep themselves safe and healthy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just under a quarter of pupils thought that not all pupils were treated fairly in school.

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, Culture and Sport, 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, Longman House, 28 Longman House, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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Our complaints procedure

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.

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