

**Blackness Primary School
Dundee City Council
7 March 2006**

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 supported?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	5
7. Improving the school	6
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	8
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	9
How can you contact us?	10

1. Background

Blackness Primary School was inspected in October and November 2005 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 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 an area in the west of Dundee. At the time of the inspection the roll was 281. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was below the national average. A number of pupils took extended absences abroad during term time. The school had experienced a long period of staffing difficulties.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- A productive and positive ethos and strong pastoral care.
- The whole school's approach to promoting equality, fairness and diversity.
- The school's commitment to health promotion, including the implementation of national advice on improving aspects of school meals.

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 were positive about most aspects of school life. They felt that their children enjoyed being at school and they felt welcomed by all staff. They recognised that

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

communication with the school had improved over the last year and that the school had a more positive reputation in the community. They found the annual pupil progress reports too impersonal and wanted increased opportunities to see their children's work throughout the school year. A few expressed the view that able pupils were not challenged sufficiently. Pupils were proud of their school and felt they were treated fairly by all staff. They were very pleased with the new playground equipment and enjoyed the range of healthy choices in the tuck shop. Older pupils talked eagerly about their responsibilities around the school. A few pupils did not like having to wait for lunch and expressed concern about the lack of privacy in the toilets. Staff were very positive about all aspects of the school and enjoyed working in it. They particularly noted the strong teamwork in the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Teachers provided pupils with an appropriate and well-balanced curriculum. Across the school, curriculum flexibility time had been used across a range of areas. For example, the school had a strong commitment to the provision of regular high quality experiences in science. An effective approach to health promotion was evident at all stages. Visiting teachers of physical education (PE), drama, music and art enhanced pupils' experiences in the expressive arts and supported class teachers in the extension of these activities. Enterprise activities were well established at several stages. Citizenship featured strongly in the school's social subjects and personal and social development activities. The school had not yet established whole school approaches to interactive mental mathematics or problem-solving. At several stages the pupils had some opportunities to develop skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) however this was not consistent across the school or across the curriculum. Overall, the quality of teaching was good. Teachers worked effectively with pupils in class, group and individual situations and most used praise effectively to motivate pupils and build their confidence. Most shared the purposes of lessons clearly with pupils and made effective use of questioning to promote pupils' thinking and check their understanding. Staff had made a good start to providing written feedback to pupils, particularly in English language activities. However, in other areas of the curriculum pupils were not always sure of how to improve their work. Staff provided a good range of homework activities and allowed appropriate flexibility for pupils on when these could be completed.

The quality of pupils' learning experiences was good. Pupils were enthusiastic learners, eager to work hard and please their teachers. They were very well behaved in class. Most pupils listened attentively to teachers and produced work of a good quality. Across the school, pupils worked very well together in pairs and small groups. In P7, pupils co-operated well in teams to solve a mathematical problem in the gym. In P2, they shared ideas about what to do next in their drama activities. Older pupils had good opportunities for research in their environmental studies tasks. Across the school, there was scope for increasing the range of independent play and learning experiences. In some classes, the pace of learning was often too slow.

Across the school, pupils demonstrated self-confidence and positive attitudes towards others. They willingly took on additional responsibilities, including acting as buddies to younger pupils and assisting with the tuck shop. Pupils contributed effectively to the school's decision making progress through the pupil council and Eco-committee. Their views had greatly influenced playground developments, which had included gaining funds for a climbing wall. Pupils had received an enterprise award for their stationery shop project. They had also produced a CD-ROM linked to a study of World War 2 which was well received in a recent competition. Pupils regularly participated in a range of sporting and cultural events, and had achieved success in the Dundee Schools' Music festival. The school and parents regularly raised funds for charitable organisations at home and abroad.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was adequate. There had been no significant improvement of standards in reading, although pupils' attainment in writing had improved recently. A number of pupils were achieving national levels earlier than would normally be expected. The school was unable to give evidence of pupils' attainment in listening and talking. The majority of pupils were making good progress in their classwork, including pupils who spoke English as an additional language. Many pupils were capable of achieving higher standards in English language. At all stages, pupils listened attentively to teachers' explanations and instructions. By P7, pupils showed good discussion skills and throughout the school pupils were able to talk well about their work with each other. Pupils read aloud fluently and had a very good understanding of what they had read. Pupils in P6 and P7 could use books and the internet effectively to locate information. Across the school, pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes, including the publication of books and writing about topic work on the Victorians and health promotion. Overall, the presentation of pupils' work was good. A few pupils could improve their skills in spelling and punctuation.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was adequate. A majority of pupils had achieved appropriate national levels of attainment over the past three years. Improvements had been made in attainment over the last year, with some pupils achieving national levels earlier than might normally be expected. Across the school, pupils had developed good information handling skills and were competent in interpreting graphs. There was insufficient use of ICT to support and extend learning in this aspect of mathematics. At the upper stages, almost all pupils coped well with written calculations in number, money and measurement. However, they were less confident in mental calculations, and were slow in their recall and use of numbers. Pupils had a good understanding of three-dimensional shape and symmetry and in working with angles. By P7 pupils had not yet developed an awareness of problem-solving strategies.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school provided a very high quality of pastoral care. Staff knew pupils and families very well and were very sensitive to pupils' social and emotional needs. Appropriate arrangements were in place to ensure pupils' care and welfare. All staff had a good understanding of child protection procedures. Pupils knew what they should do if they had any concerns. The school promoted healthy lifestyles through the health education programme and across school life. Pupils engaged in active play outdoors and older pupils participated regularly in netball and football after school. The 'Eating for Health' assistant made a significant contribution to this aspect of school life. She supported pupils well in the dining-room, encouraging healthy choices and developing social skills. With the help of pupils, she organised the excellent tuck shop which was well used.

Staff made good provision for pupils with differing abilities, and a flexible approach to learning and teaching ensured all pupils were appropriately involved in classroom activities. However, abler pupils were not always sufficiently challenged. Staff made good use of effective procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of pupils who needed extra support. Staff provided appropriate support for pupils experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning and prepared individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which were shared with pupils and parents. Targets within IEPs focused on too narrow a range of skills. Pupils receiving additional support, including pupils who spoke English as an additional language, were making good progress towards the appropriate learning targets set for them. Support for learning staff also provided very good activities to support the physical development of some pupils. There were well-established arrangements in place to ensure that pupils transferred smoothly from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The large Victorian building was warm, welcoming and mostly well maintained. Teachers made effective use of classrooms and open areas to display pupils' work and school achievements. There was a well-used music room and a welcoming support for learning base. The atmosphere in the small but well-furnished dining-room promoted healthy eating both in the quality of the meals provided and in the displays around the room. However, there needed to be a review of the accommodation for pupils eating packed lunches. The gym was located on the first floor of the school and was also used as a thoroughfare. Lessons were often interrupted. There were no changing facilities for PE. The staff room could only be accessed from outside the school and toilet facilities for staff and pupils were limited. Aspects of the accommodation which hindered access for all users were discussed with the headteacher and education authority. The playground area had been very well developed by the school and parents, and provided improved facilities for pupils' physical play.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The overall climate of the school was happy and industrious. Visitors were warmly welcomed by pupils and all members of staff. Staff and pupils had very good working relationships. Pupils worked well in class and were well behaved and polite. Staff had high expectations of pupils' achievements and a range of these were celebrated on notice boards and at regular gatherings. There was a need to raise expectations of attainment for some pupils. Across the school, pupils were developing positive attitudes about diversity and an awareness of the needs of others. Learning about fairness and equality, including race equality was an important and prominent aspect of school life. Pupils had regular opportunities to take part in religious observance. A number of pupils were withdrawn from these activities by parental choice.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school's partnership with parents and the community was good. Teachers provided regular helpful information to parents on their children's progress and information about the curriculum. This included information about sensitive health issues. Well-presented newsletters kept parents up to date with school events and achievements. New external notice boards had further enhanced communication with parents and visitors to the school. Staff had identified accurately that there could be more opportunity for parents to be in school and to attend assemblies and gatherings. The school was well supported by the School Board and groups of parents were effectively involved in regular fund-raising. The school had increasingly effective links with the local business community. Staff made good use of the local area to support children's learning.

7. Improving the school

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

The school had the capacity for ongoing improvement. Pupils were making good progress in their learning across a number of areas of the curriculum. Attainment in some aspects of English language and mathematics had improved recently but there was still room for improvement. Pupils were developing a range of positive attitudes and skills across the curriculum. However, abler pupils were, at times, insufficiently challenged in their work. Teachers were well prepared and organised and there were some very good examples of effective teaching. All staff were committed to improving the quality of pupils' experiences and achievements. There was a strong climate of care, trust and respect across the school.

At the time of the inspection the headteacher had been in post for two weeks. He had begun to forge relationships with staff, pupils and parents, and had a high profile around the school. The two effective depute headteachers were very committed to the school and had worked well as a team to manage the school over the last year. They were well respected by the whole school community and had motivated and encouraged all staff in their work. The newly-formed management team had begun to consider their vision of what was needed to improve pupils' attainment and develop learning and teaching. They took good account of local and national advice in their developments. They were very well supported by all teachers and support staff. The school had recently developed a range of appropriate strategies to evaluate the quality of its work. It had an annual programme of activities to monitor all aspects of the work of the school. The management team had visited classes on an informal basis, to observe learning and teaching across the school and sample pupils' work. All teachers were involved in the evaluation of their own planning and met with the management team to

discuss pupil attainment. However, a more systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring and self-evaluation was required.

Main points for action

The school and the education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the work of the school. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- raise attainment in English language and mathematics;
- ensure the pace of learning and level of challenge are sufficient to meet the needs of all pupils;
- provide pupils with regular well-planned learning experiences in information and communications technology; and
- improve the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school.

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.

Susan R Duff
HM Inspector

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

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

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	Good
Self-evaluation	Adequate

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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents felt welcome in the school. • Their children enjoyed being at school. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils in the school. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give parents better information about the school's priorities for improvement. • Explain more clearly how to help children with homework. • Improve the format of pupil progress reports.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were stuck. • Teachers checked their homework. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the amount of homework given to pupils. • Deal better with inappropriate behaviour.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, staff were pleased about all aspects of the school's work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

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, Wellgate House (Level 5), The Wellgate, Dundee DD1 2DB or by telephoning 01382 224155. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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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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