

**California Primary School  
Falkirk Council**

**31 August 2004**

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## **1. Background**

California Primary School was inspected in April 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 California, near Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the roll was 102, including 25 in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was slightly above the national average.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The school's record of improving pupils' attainments in literacy and numeracy.
- Very good examples of direct, interactive teaching in English language and mathematics.
- The high quality of pastoral care.
- Very positive relationships with parents and the community.

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

Parents generally were well satisfied with the work of the school and thought it had a deservedly good reputation in the community. Almost all pupils enjoyed being at the school and appreciated what teachers did for them. Some thought that the behaviour of pupils could be better, but almost all felt that they personally got on well with others. Staff were happy working in the school and thought it set high standards. They would, however, appreciate more involvement in consultation and decision-making.

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

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

The overall structure of the curriculum was good. It was appropriately broad but sometimes extra attention was given to English language and mathematics at the expense of other areas. Teachers had appropriate guidelines to work to in most areas. There was good attention to the progressive development of pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT). The programme for health education was not yet sufficiently systematic.

The quality of learning and teaching across the school was good, with some examples of very good practice, particularly in P1/P2. Lessons were well structured, explanations were clear and questioning was used effectively. There were very good examples of direct, interactive teaching in English language, French and mathematics. In other areas, some lessons were not pitched at the right level, or lacked visual and practical stimulus. Pupils were well motivated and in some cases they were very enthusiastic about learning. They responded well to teachers' instructions and questioning but did not have enough opportunities to work independently and in collaboration with others.

Across all stages, pupils were developing competence in ICT, particularly in word processing and finding information from the internet. They showed good recall of topics in environmental studies. For example, pupils in P3/P4 were very knowledgeable about their study of Scottish history. Pupils generally showed good environmental awareness, for example through collecting and sorting materials for recycling. In the expressive arts, pupils' work was competent but they had limited opportunities for individual self-expression. In religious and moral education, pupils showed a broad awareness of major religious traditions but some concepts had proved too difficult for the younger pupils.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Levels of attainment in reading and writing had been above the national average over the last three years. Currently most pupils were achieving appropriate levels of attainment in listening, talking and reading. The majority were achieving these levels in writing. Pupils in P1/P2 were developing good early literacy skills. Those at P2 showed a good knowledge of alphabetical order and could use simple dictionaries. Pupils from P3 to P7 were maintaining good progress in reading for information and pleasure. They talked with interest about books they had read and P7 pupils were able to show some appreciation of the writer's craft in poetry. Some P7 pupils had already exceeded expected national levels in reading. Some good personal writing was in evidence from P5 to P7, showing a good grasp of sequence and interesting detail. Standards of spelling and punctuation were sound among the majority of pupils. In class, pupils listened well to teachers and showed good understanding and recall. They did not always listen as well to one another. Some individual pupils were notably articulate but their skills in group discussion were less well developed.

## **Mathematics**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Attainment had been consistently high over the last three years. Currently most pupils were attaining standards in line with appropriate national levels of attainment. Pupils who had not attained these levels were making good progress in their coursework. All pupils at P2 had attained appropriate levels earlier than expected. Throughout the school, most pupils demonstrated good standards in their mental and written calculation. At all stages, pupils' knowledge and understanding of mathematical shapes was good. They were able to use an appropriate range of graphs in surveys and were skilled at interpreting information. At P7, pupils were not sufficiently familiar with the use of computer spreadsheets to organise and display information. At all stages, pupils were developing skills in problem-solving. However, at P6 and P7, they did not have sufficient understanding of the range of strategies they could use to solve mathematical problems.

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

The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff knew pupils well and were sensitive to their physical, emotional and social needs. The school had appropriate policies and procedures on positive behaviour, anti-bullying and child protection. Almost all pupils in P4 to P7 who answered the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they knew what to do if they were upset. They agreed that the school was good at sorting out problems and that they felt safe and well looked after. Arrangements for pupils' welfare included the provision of drinking water in classes, free fruit in P1/P2 and healthy options in school meals.

Support for pupils' learning was fair overall. Teachers generally set appropriate tasks for the range of ages and abilities in their classes. A classroom assistant provided valuable support in P1/P2. There were appropriate arrangements for liaison with external agencies such as speech and language therapy and the educational psychology service. Under the new community schools initiative, a family support worker had recently been appointed and was already making a valued contribution. However, there had been a number of changes in staffing arrangements for learning support and new patterns of deployment had not been agreed in full consultation with all staff. Some pupils who needed additional support to achieve expected levels in literacy were not receiving it. Systems for tracking the progress of individual pupils and making appropriate provision were not sufficiently rigorous.

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

| Aspect   | Comment   |
|--|---|
| Quality of accommodation and facilities  | <p>The overall quality of accommodation was good. Classrooms were clean and bright, but storage space was limited. Good use had been made of available space to create an attractive library area and ICT suite. Appropriate security arrangements were in place at the main entrance. There were some problems with temperature control in teaching areas and a persistent problem with water penetration into storage areas under windows.</p>  |
| Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality | <p>The school had a positive ethos, based on good relationships among and between staff and pupils. Staff used praise effectively and had high expectations of work and behaviour. Pupils were polite, friendly and helpful. Regular assemblies provided good opportunities for recognising and sharing pupils' achievements and for religious observance. The ethos of achievement would be further promoted if pupils were encouraged to evaluate their own work and be more involved in setting their own learning targets. The school had appropriate policies on gender and race equality, although further staff training in the latter was needed. Almost all pupils felt they were treated fairly and that they had a say in making the school better. The pupil council met irregularly but had had some impact on playground provision and school meals.</p>  |
| Partnership with parents and the community                                     | <p>The school had very good relationships with parents and the community. Parents received twice yearly reports on their children's progress and had good opportunities to discuss them with teachers. A recent mathematics workshop for parents had been very successful. The School Board was supportive and communicated with parents through the informative school newsletter. The PTA was active in organising social and fund-raising events for the benefit of parents and pupils. Parents and other members of the community were invited to school events throughout the year. The school had good links with other primary schools in the neighbourhood and with the local high school, which organised an annual adventure camp for P7 pupils. There were good links also with British Petroleum, which sponsored an annual science and technology day, and with other community and enterprise agencies.</p> |

## 7. Improving the school

California Primary School had a number of strengths. It provided a broad curriculum. Teaching and learning were good and often very good. The school had a good record of improving pupils' attainments in reading, writing and mathematics. Pastoral care was very good. Pupils and parents held the school in high regard. The school's plans for improvement were soundly constructed but covered too many priorities. Staff were committed to the school and were ready to play a greater part in discussing and implementing needed improvements.

The headteacher had been in post for five years. She had helped bring about improvements in accommodation and curricular programmes and had established good relationships with parents and the community. However, she had not ensured that the systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and classes were systematic enough. Staff lacked clear feedback and support, and were not sufficiently involved in self-evaluation and decisions about future developments.

The school and education authority should take action to improve further the quality of pupils' learning and procedures for quality assurance. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- develop pupils' responsibility for their own learning and their ability to work collaboratively with others;
- target learning support more effectively to meet pupils' needs;
- improve procedures for monitoring and evaluation by promoted staff; and
- involve all staff in self-evaluation and planning more effectively for improvement.

### 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. Within two years of the publication of this report parents and carers will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Allan Hawke  
HM Inspector

31 August 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

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

- Pastoral care
- 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
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness

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

- Meeting pupils' needs
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

### **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><b>What pleased parents and carers most</b></p>   | <p><b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b></p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children enjoyed school and found the work stimulating and challenging.</li> <li>• Staff set high standards and encouraged children to work to the best of their ability.</li> <li>• The school communicated well with parents and was responsive to their concerns.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few parents would have liked more helpful school reports and information on the school's priorities for improvement.</li> </ul>     |
| <p><b>What pleased pupils most</b></p>   | <p><b>What pupils would like to see improved</b></p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly, praised them when they did well and helped them when they were having difficulties with their class work.</li> <li>• Almost all pupils felt safe and well looked after at school.</li> <li>• Almost all agreed that teachers listened to pupils and helped them sort things out if they were upset.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some pupils felt that behaviour in school could be better and staff could be better at dealing with incidents of bullying.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>What pleased staff most</b></p>  | <p><b>What staff would like to see improved</b></p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff liked working in the school.</li> <li>• They thought the school set high standards for the attainment, behaviour and welfare of pupils.</li> <li>• There was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff would like more opportunities to be involved in discussion about how to achieve school priorities.</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, 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).

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 the above address. 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 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 Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

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