

**Conon Primary School
Conon Bridge
The Highland Council
20 December 2005**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	2
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils supported?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	4
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

Conon Primary School was inspected in September 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 school serves the village of Conon Bridge and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 176, including 30 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average. The school had recently experienced a period of staffing difficulties.

The nursery class was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' very good behaviour and application to their work.
- Staff commitment to ensuring the care and welfare of pupils and the very positive relationships between pupils and staff.
- Productive partnerships with the School Board, parents, agencies and the wider community.
- The leadership of the headteacher in managing change during a period of instability in staffing.

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

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, pupils and staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. Parents felt that the school was well run, friendly, caring and supportive. They thought that their children enjoyed being at school and had very good relationships with staff. They were concerned about the reduction in specialist physical education provision and felt that homework was repetitive and undemanding. Several thought that reports on pupils' progress were bland and uninformative. Pupils felt the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. They felt teachers praised them for doing well and gave them assistance when they were having difficulty. A significant minority felt that they were given too much homework which was uninteresting. Staff liked working in the school which they felt had a happy, family atmosphere. They thought that the school was well led and that staff morale was much improved after a period of discontinuity in staffing and leadership. They were concerned about the recent reduction in visiting specialist provision. They wished for more opportunities for staff training.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided pupils with a broad and well-balanced curriculum which ensured a suitable focus on health promotion and the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Teachers used curriculum flexibility time to provide much of the available additional time for the teaching of English language and mathematics, but had not yet evaluated its effectiveness. Staff had recently improved the reading programme by providing a wider range of reading materials. These were effective in motivating pupils to read. From P4 to P7, a teacher delivered effective science and technology lessons which developed pupils' skills progressively. Lessons were well organised and prepared. Teachers worked directly with groups, individuals and the whole class. They gave clear explanations and instructions and used praise well to build pupils' self-confidence and reward their achievements. Teachers did not always focus their questioning on extending pupils' responses and challenging their thinking. They did not consistently share with pupils what they expected them to learn from their lessons. They gave pupils regular homework to reinforce aspects of classwork, but the range of tasks was too narrow. In most classes, teachers did not make sufficient use of discussion to promote pupils' learning in English language and mathematics. They tended to rely too much on textbooks and workbooks when teaching those curricular areas.

Most pupils were motivated in their learning. They stayed on tasks with minimal supervision and worked purposefully on classwork. They co-operated and supported each other well on writing and music activities and science investigations. In most classes, pupils worked well together on annual class enterprise activities. However, pupils too frequently worked as individuals to complete written tasks. They did not have enough opportunities to work collaboratively with others on practical and interactive activities.

Pupils were not always clear about what they needed to do to improve. In several classes, the pace of learning was slow.

Pupils' confidence, self-esteem and social skills were very well developed. The pupil council was successfully involving pupils in decision making about aspects of school life. Pupils were knowledgeable about a healthy lifestyle and understood the importance of making sensible choices and taking exercise. Considerable progress had been made towards becoming a health promoting school. Most pupils understood how to operate a simple business by taking part in successful class enterprise activities. These included designing and producing good luck cards, a school newspaper and a Christmas show for senior citizens. The annual P7 residential visit enabled pupils to experience a wide range of sports and activities. A good range of activities additional to the formal curriculum provided effective support for pupils' personal and social development. Senior pupils were developing good citizenship skills by undertaking many additional responsibilities, including house captain and buddying roles. School teams participated successfully in cross country running competitions and the choirs had been presented with certificates of distinction at the Inverness Music Festival.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Attainment in reading had been falling in recent years particularly at the middle and upper stages. However, it was improving this year. Most pupils by P3, and a majority from P4 to P7, were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading, writing. At all stages, a significant number of pupils were achieving above these levels. Pupils listened attentively to their teachers and each other. Almost all talked confidently and expressed themselves well. At the upper stages, pupils contributed effectively in discussions. They could speak knowledgeably about their favourite authors and books they had enjoyed. Across the school, most pupils read regularly for pleasure. At the early stages, pupils were learning to read using letter sounds and words, but the pace of learning needed to be increased. Pupils' written work was carefully presented. Pupils wrote for a variety of purposes and most were making good progress in their writing skills. At the middle stages, pupils were writing informal letters with increasing competence. A significant minority of pupils at the upper stages used vocabulary very well to enrich the quality of their writing.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils' attainment over the past few years had remained stable and was improving this year. From P3 to P7, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels. A significant number had achieved these earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who had not attained appropriate national levels were making suitable progress with classwork. By P7, pupils were able to handle information effectively using an appropriate range of graphs and surveys. They were beginning to use computers to create simple databases and spreadsheets. Throughout the school, most pupils were good at number work and performed mental and written calculations well. Pupils at P6 and P7 were able to calculate 12 and 24 hour time durations accurately. At most stages, pupils' skills in practical measurement of volume, weight and length required improvement. Across the

school, pupils identified a range of shapes and described their properties well. Pupils were developing skills in problem-solving and enquiry, but they were not confident in identifying the strategies used to reach solutions.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school had very good arrangements to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils. Staff knew pupils well and were responsive to their social and emotional needs. The school had effective approaches to dealing with bullying and pupils felt safe and well looked after in school. Staff had clear guidance on how to respond to child protection issues and followed procedures appropriately. The school successfully promoted pupils' health and well-being through a range of activities which included healthy eating initiatives, personal safety projects and fitness events. It had a good range of activities to support children moving from nursery to primary education. The school had effective arrangements to support pupils moving on to secondary school.

Overall, the school's approaches to meeting pupils' needs were adequate. The school had effective approaches to accessing additional support for pupils experiencing difficulties with aspects of learning. Classroom assistants provided very effective support to pupils and made an important contribution to the quality of pupils' learning experiences. The visiting support teacher assisted in planning effective individualised educational programmes for some pupils and in providing helpful support to individuals and small groups. Teachers provided activities for differing abilities but tasks were not always well matched to pupils' individual learning needs, particularly in English language and mathematics. In too many classes, tasks did not ensure an appropriate level of pace and challenge for all pupils.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. The school building and large, attractive grounds were very well maintained and security arrangements were appropriate. Although space was limited, staff made effective use of all areas to create a bright and stimulating learning environment. Pupils' achievements were interestingly displayed in the corridor and open areas. Pupils benefited from a large, attractive library and additional areas for activities including science, technology and music. Access to the school building for disabled users was appropriate, although the entrance and door ways were narrow. The provision of toilets for pupils at the early stages was limited.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>All staff, pupils and parents had a strong sense of identity and pride in their school. Staff had created a welcoming environment for pupils, parents and visitors. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Throughout the school, pupils were very well-behaved, courteous and friendly. Staff had appropriate expectations for pupils' attendance and behaviour, but they did not have consistently high expectations of pupils' achievements. School assemblies provided weekly opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' successes. Citizenship assemblies were particularly successful in encouraging pupils to take responsibility and support others. The school actively promoted an inclusive environment and a sense of fairness. Pupils had some understanding of religious diversity and the school was developing its approaches to promoting race equality and to helping pupils recognise and tackle discrimination.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school's partnership with parents and the local community was very good. The School Board and PTA were very supportive and worked hard to promote the school in the community. Parents helped regularly in classes, with outings and fundraising events. The headteacher had greatly improved procedures for keeping parents well informed about the school's priorities for improving the school. These included regular newsletters, open afternoons and homework diaries, in which parents were encouraged to comment on their children's learning. Parents received helpful annual reports on their children's progress, although these needed to be more detailed and user-friendly. Staff consulted parents appropriately on sensitive health issues such as personal relationships and sexual health. Pupils' involvement in school concerts and fund raising enhanced the school's reputation in the local community. The school had good links with schools in the local area and their associated secondary school.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

Conon Primary School provided a positive and caring learning environment. It had an important role in the local community and made a strong contribution to it. Staff provided pupils with a range of learning experiences which made effective use of the local environment and facilities to enhance their learning. The school was maintaining good standards of attainment, but a significant number of pupils were capable of achieving higher standards. Overall, teachers worked conscientiously to support pupils, but too frequently pupils' learning experiences were not sufficiently stimulating or challenging.

The headteacher provided good, purposeful leadership. She demonstrated a strong vision and commitment to the school. Since her appointment almost a year ago, she had developed very positive relationships with staff, pupils and parents and had greatly improved communication. She had led improvements to the school which were having a positive impact on pupils' experiences, particularly in English language. The headteacher used a number of appropriate approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. However, the processes were not always carried out with sufficient rigour. The information gathered was not always used effectively to address identified weaknesses. The headteacher needed to focus more clearly on improving further the quality of learning and teaching and pupil attainment and achievement. With the continued support of the education authority, the school is well placed to continue to serve its pupils effectively.

Main points for action

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

- improve further the quality of pupils' learning experiences and the meeting of pupils' needs;
- ensure more effective learning and teaching;
- develop further the school's approaches to self-evaluation to ensure a positive impact on pupils' experience; and
- review the provision of toilets for pupils at the early stages.

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.

June Graham
HM Inspector

20 December 2005

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	Adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Good

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

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

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly. • Children found the work stimulating and interesting. • The mutual respect between teachers and pupils and the care and welfare for the children. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information on the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils. • Teachers' explanations of children's strengths and weaknesses. • The range of homework.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helped them keep themselves safe and healthy. • Teachers praised them when they had done something well. • Teachers were good at letting them know how to improve their learning. • Teachers checked their homework and gave them assistance when they were having difficulty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of homework. • The behaviour of a few pupils.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular staff discussion about how to achieve school priorities. • Staff liked working in the school and felt the school was well led. • Pupils were enthusiastic about learning and there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • Standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication between support staff and the headteacher.

How can you contact us?

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