

**Cullen Primary School
The Moray Council
31 October 2006**

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1. Background

Cullen Primary School was inspected in June 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 representatives of the parent support group, and a group of parents¹. There was no School Board.

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 the town of Cullen and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 172, including 28 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 work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Attainment in English language and mathematics.
- Carefully planned learning activities to develop pupils' writing skills.
- Activities involving pupils, parents and staff to promote a healthy lifestyle.
- The commitment of staff to promoting and celebrating pupils' attainment and wider achievement.
- The leadership of the headteacher and principal teachers.

¹ 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 were very positive about all aspects of the work of the school. They felt that the school consulted them well on its developments, dealt effectively with any concerns they might have, and was well led. Pupils were very happy with almost everything in the school. They said that teachers expected them to work as hard as they could, and helped them keep safe and healthy. A few pupils had concerns about the standards of behaviour of some pupils. Staff were very positive about working in the school. They particularly valued the support they received from colleagues, and the leadership of the school by the headteacher and principal teachers.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was broad and balanced and of very good quality. It promoted the development of pupils' skills in English language, mathematics and environmental studies very effectively. Staff allocated flexible time to English language and mathematics which was having a positive impact on pupils' attainment. A visiting teacher, and instrumental instructors, gave effective support to the development of pupils' musical skills. Staff paid very good attention to pupils' personal development and the successful promotion of healthy living through carefully planned activities. At all stages, pupils had very useful opportunities to develop their enterprise skills. The overall quality of teaching was good. Teachers consistently shared the purpose of lessons with pupils. This successfully kept pupils involved in their learning. In most lessons teachers questioned pupils effectively to check their understanding. In almost all classes, praise was used well to encourage pupils to work hard and assisted in developing positive relationships. Almost all teachers were effective in letting pupils know what they needed to do to improve. Overall, homework was used well to enhance pupils' learning. Teachers now needed to ensure that teaching in all areas of the curriculum matched the high quality of lessons in English language.

The overall quality of pupils' learning was good. Almost all pupils were well behaved and hardworking. They were particularly enthusiastic in those lessons where teachers had involved them fully in what they were to learn and informed them of what they needed to do to improve. In many lessons, particularly in religious and moral education (RME) and English language, pupils were challenged by teachers to think deeply about ideas and concepts. In P2, staff were developing pupils' thinking skills systematically through a well-structured programme. At all stages pupils responded well to opportunities to work together on language and some problem solving tasks. The pace of learning was particularly brisk in writing lessons. It was too slow in a few mathematics and environmental studies lessons.

The school successfully promoted pupils' wider achievement in a range of activities including sports such as tennis, football and cross country, and the Rotary Club primary

school quiz. Pupils' knowledge and appreciation of enterprise was very well developed. Pupils in P3 had organised all aspects of an evening for parents, based on the promotion of healthy eating. This included costing and selling tickets for the event. Pupils from P7 ran the school tuck shop as an enterprise project. They had contacted local suppliers and dieticians, and ensured that items were attractively presented. This was successfully encouraging healthy choices by pupils at break times. As part of the development of citizenship, pupils at P4 and P5 had visited Findhorn Foundation and a waste enterprise company. Throughout the school, pupils' creativity was well developed in art and design and music. Pupils in P5 had made models of the masks of gods during their project on ancient Egypt. They had developed a good understanding of aspects of worship in that time. Pupils at all stages made very good use of the limited provision for information and communications technology (ICT) for mathematical number games and research. Pupils at the upper stages effectively used presentation software to enhance class talks. They had made effective use of email links with Japan for their environmental studies project.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Most pupils were attaining national attainment levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Throughout the school a significant number of pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might be expected. Attainment in writing had shown a clear trend of improvement over the previous five years. Attainment in reading had been improving too, though there had been a temporary decline in 2005. Pupils who required additional support with their learning were making very good progress. At all stages pupils listened very well to instructions and responded appropriately. Pupils in P2 used good vocabulary during discussions on story writing. In P7, pupils spoke confidently to an audience when delivering well prepared talks. Pupils responded very positively to the overall encouragement of reading by teachers. From the early stages many pupils read with considerable expression and fluency. By P7 pupils read widely for pleasure. They had a good understanding of a range of different styles of writing and of the different techniques writers used. Most pupils wrote very well for a wide range of purposes. They were skilled in developing characters, and in creating atmosphere in their written work. Standards of handwriting and presentation were high.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. It had been improving overall, although there had been a slight drop in 2005. Almost all pupils at the early stages and most at the middle and upper stages were attaining appropriate national attainment levels. A significant number were achieving them earlier than might normally be expected. Those pupils who were not achieving relevant national levels were making very good progress in their learning. Pupils could interpret accurately graphs appropriate to their stage. Some at the upper stages had used spreadsheets effectively to organise and display information. They had carried out surveys, including tallying and analysing pupil choices at lunchtimes, which had informed canteen staff of how they might improve the range of choices available. At all stages, pupils' skills in mental calculation were very well developed. They could discuss how to carry out calculations quickly and accurately. Pupils could also carry out written calculations accurately in a range of situations, including measurement. Pupils in P3

had developed these skills in using number particularly effectively through working on their enterprise project. Throughout the school, pupils knew the names and main properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Most pupils could tackle a range of mathematical problems effectively and discuss the strategies they had used.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school had very good approaches to ensuring the care and welfare of pupils. Almost all pupils had a very high awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and how to achieve this through exercise and eating sensibly. They understood the dangers of drugs, including alcohol and smoking. Staff understood and implemented the school's appropriate child protection procedures. They were sensitive to pupils' needs and concerns, and dealt effectively with any incidents of bullying.

Teachers and support staff worked effectively as a team and met pupils' needs well. They were particularly effective in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils who needed additional support in their learning. The support for learning teacher worked with small groups of pupils, and gave them a high quality learning experience. A few pupils who could not access a full curriculum had individualised educational programmes (IEPs). These IEPs were drawn up and reviewed in consultation with class teachers, parents and professionals, including the educational psychologist. Targets within IEPs were appropriate, and were helping pupils make good progress in their learning. Staff effectively assisted families who needed advice and help from health and social work professionals. Within classes, teachers matched tasks and activities well to pupils' prior attainment and learning. They used the limited ICT provision well to support pupils' learning. Teachers did not always make sufficient use of real-life contexts for work in mathematics and RME.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. The school provided a welcoming and stimulating learning environment. Extensive playing fields were very well used for sports and games. Staff used the garden area and its family of oystercatchers effectively as a stimulus for lessons in art and environmental studies. The school and education authority were reviewing the security system. Access was very restricted for persons with mobility difficulties. The shortage of space restricted the ability of staff, including specialist staff, to work with small groups of pupils.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff, pupils and parents were proud of the school. Almost all pupils wore uniform. They were polite and friendly to visitors. In almost all classes, relationships between pupils and staff were very positive and pupils were very well behaved. Pupils were beginning to be involved in making decisions about the school through the pupil council and Eco Council. The school had very good approaches to promoting and celebrating pupils' wider achievement. This was done through the 'achievement wall' and at regular assemblies, which were also used for religious observance. Staff recognised and celebrated pupils' achievements outside school. Overall, the school took great care to treat all pupils fairly. In particular, staff provided effective additional support to those pupils who needed it. Staff promoted effectively pupils' awareness of other religions and cultures, and racial equality. The school had effective procedures for dealing with any racial equality issues. Staff now needed to consider how to address the feelings of some pupils that they were not treated fairly.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had a very good partnership with parents and the community. Staff kept parents well informed of the school's work through regular newsletters. Reports on pupils' progress were clear and informative. The headteacher ensured that the school responded very quickly to any parental queries. Parents were well involved in school events such as the Healthy Fun Night and in a few environmental studies lessons. The parent support group was very active in supporting school events. Arrangements for transition of pupils from the nursery or to the secondary school were very sound. They included some very effective curricular links to ensure continuity in pupils' learning from primary to secondary school. Links with local clubs, schools, churches and sports organisations supported the school's work. Officers from the education authority had given very effective support to the school, particularly in the development of the teaching of writing.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

Cullen Primary School was delivering high levels of attainment within a very caring environment. In most lessons, pupils had a very positive learning experience. Staff promoted and celebrated achievement in sports and other activities both in school and in the community. Teachers were working successfully to encourage pupils to live healthy lives through the work of the Health Group. They were developing in pupils an understanding of the world around them, and the confidence to contribute as citizens. Staff effectively worked in partnership with parents, and gave them further support when required. Overall, the school was very successful in implementing its vision for its pupils and their families, and was well placed to continue to develop.

The school was very well led. The headteacher knew the staff, the pupils and their community very well. She had been successful in improving attainment, achievement and the quality of pupils' learning, particularly in English language. She was clear on how further improvement could be made by improving the consistency of pupils' learning experiences. Her thorough professional knowledge included the latest ideas on the use of assessment information and in pupils' personal development. She was implementing these ideas effectively. She had successfully formed partnerships with parents to engage them in supporting their children's learning. Two principal teachers had been in post for less than a year. Within that time they had had a major positive impact on the life of the school. They had successfully built on the school's work on enterprise and health promotion and had clear plans to improve this further. The school's approaches to evaluating its work were very good. The headteacher observed teachers' lessons, and monitored their plans. Feedback to staff was detailed and useful. The headteacher carefully monitored the attainment of pupils. She ensured that individuals and groups made appropriate progress, and organised additional support where necessary. Staff as a whole showed a commitment to improving the experiences for pupils. The headteacher consulted well with staff, parents and pupils on what the school needed to do to improve.

Main points for action

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:

- address the accessibility and health and safety issues identified in this report; and
- continue to improve the quality of pupils' learning and the extent to which their needs are being met.

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.

Brian Stewart
HM Inspector

31 October 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	very good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

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	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents and the community	very good

Improving the school	
Leadership	very good
Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities	very good
Self-evaluation	very good

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 were very positive about all aspects of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils were very positive about almost all aspects of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few had concerns about the behaviour of some pupils and how fairly pupils overall were treated in the school.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff were very positive about all aspects of the school.	<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 Educational Services, 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 Road, Longman East, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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