

**Dallas Primary School
The Moray Council
18 April 2006**

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1. Background

Dallas 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, and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the village of Dallas and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 35. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' involvement in and understanding of how to improve their own learning.
- Teamwork amongst staff.
- Pupils' use of information and communications technology (ICT) in their classwork.
- Cross-curricular links to provide meaningful contexts for learning and teaching.
- The quality of leadership for learning.

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.

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

All parents were very positive about the school. They indicated a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school and most commented very favourably about the improvements the headteacher had put in place. Parents felt welcomed in the school and were happy to be further involved with their children's learning. All pupils were happy in the school and enjoyed their time there. Many found the new arrangements for learning and teaching introduced by the headteacher helped them to achieve more highly in their classwork. Staff unanimously praised the teamwork promoted by the headteacher and felt that their views on running the school were highly valued. They thought that the school was very well led and that relationships with pupils and parents were of very high quality.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school had recently improved the quality of its curriculum. Time allocations to English language and mathematics were appropriate. Additional time was allocated flexibly to ICT and other aspects of the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils well. Good attention was paid to science, social subjects and the expressive arts. Pupils' experiences were broad and balanced but technology, enterprise and health education required further development. Teachers effectively enhanced pupils' learning by linking different areas of the curriculum. For example they incorporated ICT in all areas and developed listening and talking in a wide range of contexts. The quality of teaching was very good and pupils were highly motivated in lessons. Teachers consistently shared the purpose of each lesson with pupils and explained what the targets for each learning episode were. Teachers made very good use of ICT, including an inter-active whiteboard, to enhance their teaching. They stimulated pupils' imaginations by introducing them to information about other countries and cultures. They used praise very well and frequently illustrated lessons with real life contexts. Homework was regular and appropriate.

Throughout the school, pupils took responsibility for, and were actively involved in, their own learning. There were many instances of very effective cooperative working by pupils. They were very good at thinking independently and all were aware of what was to be learned and how they could improve their work. They were highly motivated and worked enthusiastically. Almost all responded very well to teachers' questions. Pupils effectively used their ICT skills to research widely and explore ideas and find information relating to their work in environmental studies.

At all stages, pupils sang enthusiastically and enjoyed the weekly sessions of singing practice and the after school guitar club. Their knowledge of aspects of science and geography was developing steadily across the stages. Pupils showed good creativity skills at all stages and displayed these in numerous instances of attractive paintings and drawings in the styles of famous artists. The pupil council was an effective means of conveying pupils' views. This work had involved pupils in helping to improve the school grounds and constructing the school travel plan. Pupils' involvement in a recycling project, and contacts with an orphanage in Bulgaria, gave pupils an interest in, and awareness of, issues affecting the environment and children less fortunate than themselves. Pupils had raised considerable sums for charity over a period of years,

helping them to become active contributing citizens and develop further an appreciation of the needs of others.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Levels of attainment had been consistently high in recent years. Pupils made steady progress from stage to stage and by P7 almost all achieved national attainment levels in reading and writing. At all stages pupils had high levels of skill in listening and talking. They responded perceptively and in detail to teachers' questions. In reading, pupils read fluently from P2 and showed good comprehension of what they had read. Pupils' knowledge about language was very good. Almost all read widely for enjoyment. Those who were experiencing difficulty in reading were well supported to make good progress by teachers and support staff. At P7, pupils showed a good understanding of how poets and authors used certain words and phrases to deliver specific messages in English and Scots. They clearly identified main messages in poems and prose passages. At all stages pupils showed good skill in extracting information from a wide range of written and pictorial sources, including the Internet. From P2 onwards pupils wrote on an appropriate range of topics. By P6/P7, pupils regularly produced well-drafted imaginative pieces, but they required to write at greater length.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. All pupils had achieved appropriate national levels for their stage and were making very good progress in their coursework. Standards had been maintained over recent years. Pupils had used a range of graphs to display with accuracy information related to their environmental studies topics. By the upper stages, pupils could use spreadsheets effectively to draw graphs using computers. At the early stages, pupils could use coins and give the correct change in shopping activities. At all stages, pupils performed appropriate written and mental calculations quickly and accurately. By P7, pupils worked confidently with fractions and decimals. Across the school, pupils were able to identify a range of two- and three-dimensional shapes and discuss their properties. Pupils at the upper stages solved mathematical problems systematically and discussed their strategies with one another.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff knew pupils very well and responded sensitively to their social, emotional and behavioural needs. The school's procedures for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were appropriate and well understood by all staff. Arrangements for supervising pupils in the playground and encouraging games and exercise were very good. Pupils' personal and social development was very well supported by learning about important aspects of healthy and safe living, including personal safety, relationships, respect for others and substance misuse. The school was beginning to promote healthy lifestyles.

The school's approaches to meeting pupils' additional learning needs were very good. The school engaged effectively with a wide range of educational and other professionals, as required, to support pupils with additional support needs. Teachers were aware of the range of their pupils' needs and worked well with staff involved in support for learning. At all stages, tasks and activities were consistently challenging and well-matched to pupils'

abilities. The new arrangements whereby pupils had personal learning plans and worked together at appropriate attainment levels rather than by age-related stages effectively met all pupils' needs. The school had very good arrangements in place to support pupils at points of transfer from nursery into P1 and from P7 into secondary. Individualised educational programmes set clear short and long term learning targets for pupils with identified specific needs. The selected tasks and activities met the needs of these pupils effectively. Learning materials were suitably differentiated. Learning support staff and classroom assistants provided well-targeted and very effective support to individuals and groups of pupils.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of the accommodation was good overall. Security arrangements were appropriate and there was appropriate access for those with physical disabilities. Space for physical education and pupil social areas was very limited. As a consequence, physical education classes were held in the village hall. Improvements to the playground and car parking arrangements were in progress. Learning and teaching resources, including ICT, were in good supply, well organised and easily accessible.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a warmly welcoming atmosphere. Staff, pupils and parents were very proud of the school. Pupil and staff morale was very high and teamwork was exceptionally strong. Relationships were very good at all levels and pupils were very well behaved. Staff set high expectations for learning and behaviour which were effectively conveyed in pupils' personal learning plans. Hard work and success were celebrated at assemblies and by an effective points system linked to achievement certificates. The system of individual work folders for English language, mathematics and environmental studies and displays of pupils' best work effectively encouraged pupils to achieve. The personal and social education programme helped pupils develop respect and tolerance for each other. Staff had effectively ensured equality of opportunity for pupils of all abilities and were working hard to enhance pupils' understanding of different cultures. There were weekly opportunities for religious observance.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The School Board was active in support of the school. Parents had arranged a number of successful fund raising activities for the school and charity. The school produced regular, informative newsletters for parents and arranged evening meetings on curriculum developments. Reports on pupils' progress were perceptive and detailed. Parents valued highly the approachability shown by staff. The school provided a number of cultural and social events for parents and the wider community. Staff also invited parents of nursery pupils about to enrol in P1 to learn about the school's curriculum and routines. The school consulted parents formally each year on potentially sensitive aspects of its health education programme.

7. Improving the school

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

The pupils of Dallas Primary School received a stimulating and challenging education which was being systematically developed and improved. Levels of attainment were high and pupils' knowledge and skills across the curriculum were improving steadily. The quality of learning and teaching was very good with deft use of ICT for teaching, learning and research by pupils. Very effective teamwork between staff and parents and the development of pupils' personal learning plans ensured swift progress in pupils' learning. The happy and caring atmosphere developed by all staff contributed significantly to pupils' enjoyment of their school life.

The headteacher had been in post for one year. In that time she had provided very good leadership and had made major improvements in pupils' learning and attainment. She had introduced innovative approaches to meeting pupils' needs and had ensured that pupils of all abilities were appropriately challenged and encouraged to achieve. Her improvements to the curriculum and her development of a shared vision and very strong team work amongst teaching and support staff directly benefited all pupils. She had put in place a number of robust approaches to self-evaluation which included observing learning and teaching, scrutinising and commenting on forward plans. Her feedback to staff, both oral and written, was perceptive, evaluative and supportive. The new system for tracking and predicting pupils' attainments enabled staff to closely match learning tasks and activities to pupils' emerging needs. Dallas Primary School was well placed to continue to improve and provide a high quality education for its pupils.

Main point 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:

- continue to extend the curriculum and embed approaches to self-evaluation.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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 the education authority working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector

18 April 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	Very good
Pupils' learning experiences	Very good
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Very good

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

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	Very good
Self-evaluation	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. 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 thought the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers kept them informed about their child's progress.• The headteacher explained how they could help with homework.• All teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment.• The headteacher led the school very well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils thought the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers explained things clearly.• Teachers listened to what they said.• Teachers checked their homework.• Teachers helped them when they had difficulty.	<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, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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