

**Forthill Primary School
Dundee City Council
31 October 2006**

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1. Background

Forthill 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 the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the Friends of Forthill, other parents¹ and representatives of the local community.

The school is a non-denominational primary school situated towards the east of the City of Dundee and serves an area mainly in the north east of Broughty Ferry. At the time of the inspection the roll was 530, including 68 in the nursery. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above 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.

- The quality of leadership for learning provided by staff at all levels throughout the school.
- The overall quality of teaching and the excellent nature of pupils' learning experiences.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes to school and learning.
- Overall levels of attainment in English language and mathematics and the quality of pupils' broader achievements.
- Pupils' skilled use of information and communications technology.
- The school's arrangements for evaluating and improving the quality of its work.

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.

Almost all parents were positive about much of the school's work. They were particularly positive about the school's reputation in the local community. They also felt school work was stimulating and challenging and that the school's buildings were kept in good order. Parents were less positive about the school's arrangements for consulting them and reporting to them about their child's overall progress. Pupils were very positive about the school. In particular, they felt teachers were good at telling them how they were getting on with their work and helped them if they experienced difficulties. They felt teachers checked their homework and helped them keep safe and healthy. Teachers were very positive about almost all aspects of the school's work. While all other staff enjoyed working in the school, most had concerns about aspects of communication

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was very good. Pupils benefited from a broad and rich range of learning experiences. The school made very good use of external organisations and visitors to enhance pupils' learning. There were very good programmes in all areas of the curriculum. The programmes enabled pupils to develop their skills continuously and progressively across the school. Visiting teachers and other specialists in art, music and physical education and the active schools sports coordinator had a very positive impact on the opportunities available to pupils. The development of pupils' information and communications technology (ICT) skills and the provision and use of ICT resources were outstanding. The school successfully gave very effective attention to health promoting activities, including healthy eating, and was working to increase time in physical education to two hours per week. Teaching was of a consistently very good quality across the school, with a number of excellent features, particularly the use of ICT in the teaching of mathematics. Teachers consistently shared the purposes of lessons with pupils and their explanations were always clear. Interactions between pupils and staff were very good. Teachers' questioning was skilled and helped pupils to develop and explore their knowledge and understanding. Teachers encouraged and valued pupils' contributions to lessons and successfully built pupils' confidence. They enabled pupils to develop very effectively as independent learners.

Pupils' learning experiences were excellent. Lessons were consistently stimulating and challenging. Pupils had very positive attitudes to learning and were highly motivated and very enthusiastic. In all lessons, they were hardworking and very well-behaved. Pupils took responsibility for their learning and were very good at working together and collaborating on tasks. The pace of learning in all lessons was brisk. Pupils made very good progress and achieved high standards. They were very active in their learning and frequently thought for themselves. They were encouraged to be imaginative and creative thinkers. They had a very good understanding of what they needed to do to improve. At all

stages, pupils were highly skilled in the use of ICT. By the upper stages, pupils were able to make very good presentations using computers and could make very effective use of digital microscopes. P7 pupils maintained the school's web-site and designed machines using computers.

Pupils had developed their enterprise skills well in a range of contexts. Across the school, pupils had achieved gold and silver awards at dance, music and arts festivals. Pupils' art work was of a very good quality using a variety of media. As part of a public art project, P7 pupils had made use of the local environment to make beach sculptures and had produced a display in the main entrance corridor to the school. Pupils from a range of classes had worked together to produce a wildlife garden in the playground. Pupils in a number of classes were able to carry out experiments in science very well. They were able to conduct fair tests, record the results and draw conclusions. Health promotion activities gave pupils opportunities to develop skills in a range of sports, including cricket, golf and tennis. Pupils participated regularly and successfully in a range of other sporting activities including gymnastics, netball, football and athletics. A group of P7 girls had started a lunchtime dance class for younger pupils. The pupil council gave pupils very good opportunities to develop their citizenship skills. P5 pupils had a very good understanding of the functions of local councils and councillors. P7 pupils acted as helpers to younger pupils. Throughout the school pupils took responsibility and demonstrated mutual respect for each other. All pupils were able to develop their presentation skills, self-esteem and confidence by participating in school and class shows and public performances.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. High levels of attainment had been sustained over several years and almost all pupils were attaining the appropriate national levels. A significant number of pupils reached these levels earlier than might be expected, particularly in reading. Across the school, pupils had well-developed skills in listening and talking to each other in groups and to adults. They were developing their skills in presenting to an audience very well. Pupils listened carefully to the ideas of others in class discussions and made effective contributions. Almost all could talk with confidence and enthusiasm about aspects of schoolwork and their interests. Pupils had very positive attitudes to reading and most read regularly for pleasure. At the middle and upper stages, pupils were able to use their reading skills effectively to access information from a range of sources. In writing, almost all pupils attained appropriate levels and at the early stages, pupils were developing their writing skills very well. At the middle and upper stages, pupils wrote extended pieces of well-structured and accurately presented work.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. Over a number of years the school had sustained high standards. Almost all pupils attained appropriate national levels, and an increasing number achieved these levels earlier than might be expected. At all stages pupils were gaining a thorough understanding of information handling. Pupils at the early stages made a very good start in acquiring basic number skills. At the middle and upper stages, pupils continued to develop and apply these strategies effectively in their written calculations. Skills in shape, position and movement were developing well as pupils progressed through stages. Pupils at the upper stages tackled mathematical problems very well. Whilst the overall pace of progress was very good, some aspects of pupils'

skills, including decimals and measurement, needed to be practised more regularly in different contexts.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The overall quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff successfully gave a high priority to ensuring that pupils were safe and well cared for. Staff knew the pupils very well and were very sensitive to their personal, social and emotional needs. There were appropriate and well understood arrangements for child protection and dealing with any possible incidents of bullying or racism. The school was actively promoting health and encouraging pupils to adopt healthy and active lifestyles, including healthy eating.

Overall, pupils' learning needs were very well met. Teachers successfully used a wide range of learning and teaching approaches that enabled all pupils to achieve appropriately high levels of attainment. All pupils were making very good progress from their prior learning and levels of attainment. The learning support teacher was very successful in addressing the needs of small groups of pupils who were at risk of not achieving levels of attainment in mathematics and English language appropriate to their age and stage. Very well targeted, sensitive and appropriate support enabled these pupils to achieve success. The learning of pupils with additional support needs was well managed. Pupils had individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which were agreed at the beginning of each year with parents and shared with pupils. Barriers to learning were clearly identified and the school had put in place a range of strategies to support the learning of individual pupils. The school reviewed progress and updated pupils' IEPs termly.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of the accommodation and facilities in the school was very good with a number of excellent features. The recently completed extension provided pupils with access to very high quality provision, including a games hall and very well resourced library. Classrooms were bright and attractive and provided a stimulating environment for learning. Almost all classrooms were equipped with high quality ICT resources which teachers used to very good effect. Pupils had access to extensive outside play areas. These included a large soft surface play area, outdoor play equipment and grass playing fields. There was suitable access for all users to the school. There were effective and secure entry systems to school buildings.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The overall quality of climate and relationships in the school was very good. Pupils and staff were very proud of the school and identified strongly with it. Pupils' behaviour was exemplary. At all times they were polite and courteous. They consistently showed concern for, and understanding of, others. Pupil and staff morale was very high. Staff successfully promoted an excellent ethos of achievement. Expectations of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour were very high. Pupils had high aspirations and very positive attitudes to school. Regular assemblies provided very good opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements. There were appropriate opportunities for religious observance and the recognition of other cultures and faiths. Overall, pupils were treated fairly and equally. Not all support staff felt fully valued. The school had an appropriate race equality policy and was committed to improving it further.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school received effective support from the School Board and the Friends of Forthill. Each year the school provided parents with detailed information about pupils' coursework. Reports on pupils' progress were detailed. They provided parents with helpful information on pupils' achievements in all curricular areas. Parents could meet with teachers early in the school year to discuss their children's progress. A few parents felt these opportunities were too infrequent. The school made very effective use of its partnerships with the local community to enhance pupils' experiences. These included links with local sports clubs, the police, partner agencies, councillors and church ministers.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

Forthill Primary School provided pupils with an excellent learning experience. The overall quality of teaching was very good, with a number of excellent features. Pupils' needs were very well met and they consistently achieved very high levels of attainment, particularly in English language and mathematics. Pupils were highly skilled in the use of ICT. They also achieved very well in a wide range of areas, including art and music. Pupils had very positive attitudes, acted responsibly and demonstrated mutual respect for others. They were confident and articulate. They enjoyed school and were safe and very well cared for.

The headteacher provided very strong and focused leadership for learning. She had a clear vision for the school and gave a high priority to ensuring that pupils received a broad and high quality educational experience. Working with staff she had successfully achieved these goals, while maintaining high standards during the recent intensive programme of refurbishment and improvements to the school buildings. She was very well supported by two depute headteachers and all teaching and support staff. All staff in the school were hardworking and very committed. Together, they provided high quality leadership for learning in their areas of responsibility. The overall quality of collective leadership throughout the school was excellent. Senior managers had systematic formal and informal approaches to monitoring the quality of learning and teaching. These approaches set very high expectations and ensured a consistently high quality experience for pupils. Pupils' progress and levels of attainment were very carefully tracked. Staff used these systems to take very effective action to address difficulties pupils were experiencing and enable all pupils to achieve appropriately high standards. The school had very effective approaches to improving its work and was very well placed to continue to provide an excellent learning experience for pupils.

What happens next?

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education by implementing the priorities identified in the school development plan. The education authority should consider how to build on the positive practice and support other schools by sharing more widely the excellent practice in the school. 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.

Chris Webb
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	very good
Pupils' learning experiences	excellent
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	very good

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	excellent
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"> • Children enjoyed school and found school work stimulating and challenging. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils at the school. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of children and treated them fairly. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • The school had a good reputation in the local community and school buildings were kept in good order. 	<p>Around a quarter of parents wanted the school to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide more helpful information about their child's strengths and weaknesses and overall progress, and • be better at consulting parents on decisions that affected their child.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers knew pupils well and explained things clearly. • Teachers told pupils how they got on with their work and helped them if they had difficulties. • Teachers told pupils when they had done something well and listened to what they said. • Teachers expected pupils to work as hard as they could and checked homework. • Pupils got on well with one another. • The school helped pupils keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around a quarter of the pupils wanted to be treated more fairly.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff liked working in the school and felt pupil success was regularly celebrated. • Pupils were enthusiastic about learning. • Staff worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community. • The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and ensured that they received constructive feedback about their work. • Staff showed concern for pupils' care and welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around a quarter of teachers and most support staff wanted improved communication between senior managers and staff. • The majority of support staff wanted to be more involved in the decision-making process and for their staff development time to be used more effectively.

How can you contact us?

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