

**Mid Calder Primary School
West Lothian Council
24 October 2006**

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1. Background

Mid Calder 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 parent-staff association (PSA), and a group of parents¹.

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 Mid Calder area of Livingston. At the time of the inspection the roll was 421, including 56 children in the nursery class. Around 17 per cent of pupils attended the school from outwith the designated catchment area as a result of parental placing requests. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. In each of the last three years, the school had been awarded the Gold Award for Enterprise education. The school had recently been awarded the Green Flag as an Eco School.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The stimulating learning environment and the quality of relationships amongst staff, pupils and parents.
- Effective use of a wide range of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance pupils' learning experiences.
- High quality learning and teaching.
- Innovative enterprise activities across the school which enhanced pupils' life skills.
- Pupils' learning experiences in music, art and design and physical education.
- Leadership of the headteacher.

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, pupils and staff were very positive about the work of the school. Almost all parents thought the school had a very good reputation in the community and was well led. They thought their children enjoyed being at school and found schoolwork stimulating and challenging. A significant number expressed serious concerns about the condition of the playground and the poor fencing around the school. Pupils thought they received good feedback from teachers who also helped them when they had difficulties. They felt they had a say in deciding how to make the school better and that teachers were good at letting them know how to improve their learning. All staff thought that pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and there was mutual respect between pupils and staff. Almost all thought that standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld. Most agreed that there was regular discussion about how to achieve school priorities and that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of curriculum was very good. Staff provided pupils with a broad curriculum and used additional time flexibly to better meet pupils' needs. In some classes, for example, the use of this time had helped raise pupils' attainment in English language. Appropriately, teachers reviewed the allocation of additional time throughout the year. At all stages, pupils were developing very good enterprise skills. With the effective support of the ICT technician, many of the projects they undertook made innovative use of ICT. Pupils had a wide range of opportunities to participate in high quality learning experiences in music, art and design and physical education. Pupils benefited from a variety of approaches to promoting healthy lifestyles, including through their enterprise activities. The overall quality of teaching was very good. Teachers consistently shared learning outcomes with pupils. In lessons, they questioned pupils carefully to check their understanding and, in some cases, to challenge their thinking. They used a range of approaches effectively to involve pupils actively in their own learning. These included encouraging pupils to make very effective use of ICT in a number of lessons. At the early stages, however, teachers were not able to make effective use of learning through play due to restrictions in the accommodation. Teachers made very good use of homework which was suitably varied and stimulating.

The quality of pupils' learning was very good. Pupils were enthusiastic about their learning. Across the school, pupils worked well together in pairs and in small groups, and demonstrated confidence and ability in taking on different roles and responsibilities. They were able to learn effectively from each other, in particular when working collaboratively on activities in mathematics, science and ICT. Teachers provided pupils with increasing opportunities to be independent in their learning

through their skilled use of ICT and activities such as 'Brain Gym' and 'Let's Think'. Pupils could confidently describe their learning targets and used these targets effectively to track their own progress. Pupils at P5/6 were able to provide helpful feedback to each other when taking part in drama activities.

Pupils had an outstanding range of opportunities to achieve. They undertook ambitious projects as part of their enterprise activities. For example, at P6 pupils had used a photographic software package to make complex art images of faces and had printed them on t-shirts to sell. All pupils from P4 to P7 had the opportunity to develop confidence through taking part in three educational residential activities in the UK and in Europe. Pupils spoke very positively about the advantages of these varied experiences. The principal teacher offered an extensive range of opportunities for pupils to perform in musical activities. Pupils were confident performers and were learning how to interact effectively with an audience through the musical events and through classroom experiences in music and drama. Pupils were developing a good understanding of global citizenship through fundraising for specific charity projects. For example, they had purchased a fishing boat for a village in Sri Lanka. Pupils were particularly proud of their involvement in the pupil council and the impact their decisions had on the life of the school. For example, the council had helped improve the arrangements for lunches in the dining room. Pupils at all stages represented the school in a variety of sporting competitions.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good and had been consistently very good over a number of years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national attainment levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. A significant number of pupils had attained these levels earlier than might normally be expected. This was particularly the case in the early stages in reading and writing and in the upper stages in reading. Those pupils not achieving these levels were well supported and were making good progress. In classes, almost all pupils listened attentively to staff and to each other. They responded very well in group discussions and most pupils spoke with confidence and clarity. Almost all pupils read fluently and older pupils could discuss their favourite authors and their enjoyment of reading. They could confidently discuss the structure, content and imagery of a poem. Across the school pupils planned their writing and wrote for a range of purposes. They were clear about the steps they needed to take to improve their writing. They presented their work carefully with attention to spelling and punctuation. They made good use of ICT to present their work for a range of purposes. Pupils in P5 had written poems with the support of a visiting Scottish poet. Across the school, pupils wrote well about their thoughts and feelings showing a good grasp of sequence and incorporating interesting detail.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. Standards of attainment had been consistently high for a number of years. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment. At all stages, high proportions of pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might be expected normally. Those pupils not achieving these levels were making good progress. Across the school, pupils were good at organising and presenting information in graphs and tables. They were beginning to use ICT to present data in a more extensive range of forms. At all stages, pupils demonstrated a good understanding of number processes. Their skills in written and mental calculations were well developed. Higher attaining pupils at P7 were not able to use more complex fractions and decimals confidently or solve simple equations. Pupils recognised two- and three-dimensional shapes appropriate to their stage and could confidently describe their properties. They were able to use a range of strategies to solve problems in a variety of contexts, including real-life situations.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The quality of pastoral care was excellent. The school placed a very high priority on ensuring that all pupils were included in all aspects of the life of the school. All staff, including ancillary staff knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to meeting their social, emotional and physical needs. Pupils felt safe and secure. They knew what to do if they had any concerns and were confident that their needs would be met. All staff were aware of their responsibilities for child protection. Pupils expressed confidence in the school's anti-bullying procedures. The school actively promoted a healthy lifestyle. Pupils could describe the benefits of healthy eating and taking part in regular physical activity. Enterprise topics included a good emphasis on health promotion, for example at P3 pupils made fruit badges. The school had effective arrangements in place to support the transfer of children from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school.

The school's approaches to supporting pupils' learning and meeting their needs were very good. Teachers chose tasks and activities carefully and planned to meet the needs of all in their class. Classroom assistants and support assistants worked alongside class teachers providing well-judged support to individuals and small groups. The ICT technician and two classroom assistants had taken responsibility for leading enterprise activities with classes. In addition, classroom assistants worked very effectively in partnership with teachers delivering the 'Let's Think' programme to small groups. Two part-time teachers of learning support provided very good support to those pupils experiencing difficulties in reading, writing and, for a very small number, in mathematics. They planned meticulously to meet the varying needs of these pupils. Their use of individual educational programmes and multi-agency support plans to target support and define clear learning targets for individuals was very good. They provided good support to individuals in class and taught small groups outwith the classroom. They were not yet teaching groups of pupils alongside class teachers sufficiently often.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
<p>Quality of accommodation and facilities</p>	<p>The school had recently been refurbished. Teachers made very effective use of specialist areas such as the music room and the library to improve pupils' learning experiences. The school was very well equipped with ICT. Teachers made good use of the available teaching areas, although there was insufficient room for pupils at the early stages to learn effectively through play. Around the school, display was used very effectively to celebrate pupils' achievements and support their learning through the sharing of learning targets. The playgrounds were too small for the number of pupils and restricted the games which pupils could play. The education authority had recently carried out some improvements to try to address the weaknesses in the playground areas. However, the fencing around the school was damaged and the lack of CCTV in the playgrounds meant that vandalism was becoming an increasing problem. The school's arrangements for security were appropriate and the building was suitable for users with restricted mobility.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>The school's climate and relationships were excellent. The stimulating learning environment encouraged pupils to display an enthusiasm for learning. Staff morale was high. The supportive relationships among all staff, pupils and parents was a key strength. Teachers had very high expectations for pupils' achievements. Pupils responded very well to these expectations and were proud of their successes. Assemblies, led by the principal teachers, were used very well to celebrate pupils' achievements and provided very good opportunities for all pupils to perform. The chaplain supported the school in its arrangements for regular religious observance. All staff promoted a strong sense of mutual respect and tolerance in all aspects of the life of the school. Pupils had a good sense of equality and fairness. Teachers used a range of appropriate approaches to promoting racial equality through their teaching.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established very effective links with parents and the local community. The School Board was very supportive and the PSA raised significant amounts of money for improvements around the school. Parents were kept very well informed through newsletters, a comprehensive school handbook and written reports on their children's progress. They supported the school in a variety of ways, for example, through working in the library with pupils and going on educational visits. While most parents were happy with the written reports, a small number found them difficult to understand. Parents were regularly consulted on aspects of the school's work, including the health programme. The school had very good links with the local community policeman, the education authority and external agencies, such as health professionals.

7. Improving the school

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

Mid Calder Primary School provided a very high quality learning experience for all its pupils. Pupils and staff were happy at the school. Standards of attainment were consistently high. The headteacher had been successful in promoting a very strong sense of achievement across the school. Pupils had a very wide range of opportunities to achieve. Much of the teaching was of a very high quality and the very good provision of ICT was impacting very positively on pupils' learning experiences. The school, under the leadership of the headteacher, had a very strong capacity for improvement.

The leadership of the school was very good. The experienced headteacher was enthusiastic about pupils' learning. He had a clear vision for the school, which was based on providing an enriching learning experience for all while maintaining high standards of attainment. He had successfully gained the support of the staff in achieving these aims. The depute headteacher provided effective support to the headteacher. She was hardworking and teachers appreciated the level of support she provided. She was now well placed to strengthen her role in leading key areas of improvement in the school. The two principal teachers had clear and appropriate remits and each played a significant role in the school. Collectively, the senior managers and principal teachers made a very strong team. The school had a very good range of approaches to self-evaluation. Teachers were committed to improving their learning and teaching. Each promoted staff member had a responsibility for monitoring forward plans and providing teachers with helpful advice on class programmes. The headteacher and depute headteacher monitored pupils' progress carefully and had observed lessons to help ensure quality. Teachers were positive about this development but some aspects of the new system had still to be improved to help share good practice and ensure an impact on the quality of pupils' learning experiences.

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:

- improve further the school's 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.

Maureen McKenna
HM Inspector

24 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	very good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	very good
Climate and relationships	excellent
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
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.

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • The school dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour. • If they raised a matter of concern the school would do something about it and the school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the quality of the playground.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being at school. • Teachers were good at dealing with bullies and tell pupils when they have done something well. • Teachers expect pupils to work hard and check their homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff liked working at the school. • The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work expected from its pupils. • They were aware of the school's procedures relating to child protection. • The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

How can you contact us?

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