

**Mill of Mains Primary School  
Dundee City Council  
13 June 2006**

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## 1. Background

Mill of Mains Primary School was inspected in March 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 and staff. Members of the inspection team also met a group of parents<sup>1</sup>, including members of the parent consultative group. There was no School Board.

The school serves an area to the north of Dundee. At the time of the inspection the roll was 247, including 29 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was below the national average.

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.

- The broad curriculum, which included well planned health education activities.
- Pastoral care and the school's successful efforts to promote equality and fairness in the school.
- Partnership with parents and the local community.
- The school's accommodation, which helped staff to create a pleasant environment for learning.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents had positive views about almost all aspects of the school's work. They felt that their children enjoyed being at school and that it had a good reputation in the community. They thought that parents' evenings were helpful and informative. A few did not feel that the school encouraged pupils to work to the best of their ability. A minority had concerns about aspects of the school's communication with parents. Almost all pupils enjoyed being at the school, felt safe, and thought that their views on making the school better were listened to. Most felt that the behaviour of pupils was good. Staff had positive views about the school. They felt that training and development time was used effectively.

### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

#### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The school's curriculum was broad and balanced. Flexibility time was put to good use for a range of activities, including information and communications technology (ICT) and improving attainment in aspects of English language and mathematics. Visiting specialists made an effective contribution in physical education and art. Pupils had good opportunities to apply their writing and mathematics skills in other areas of the curriculum. An effective approach to health promotion was evident at all stages. The quality of teaching was good. Teachers usually gave clear explanations. They did not always use questioning sufficiently well to assess pupils' understanding and make them think for themselves. Some teachers were making good progress in explaining to pupils what they were to learn, and developing pupils' skills in evaluating their own work. Teachers provided a good range of homework activities for pupils.

The quality of pupils' learning was adequate. At all stages, most pupils were enthusiastic about the tasks they were given. They were not always encouraged successfully to work diligently when outwith direct supervision. This aspect of their learning needed to be developed more effectively from the early stages onwards. Pupils responded well when given challenging and motivating tasks, for example, in physical education or using computers. Overall, however, they needed more opportunities to take responsibility and be independent in their learning. At all stages, pupils benefited from vigorous physical education activities. For example, P1 pupils participated enthusiastically and made good progress in a gymnastics lesson. Pupils in P4/P5 also benefited from practical physical education activities. At all stages, pupils had opportunities to use ICT, although the time each pupil had for first-hand practical experience was sometimes limited. By P7, pupils were able to use computers effectively to illustrate their oral presentations or to draw graphs and charts as part of their environmental studies. Pupils participated well in class discussions as part of the school's programme for personal, social and health education. For example P6 pupils contributed well to a discussion about the importance of working diligently. On

occasion these discussions were not managed sufficiently well by some teachers to ensure good use of time.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was adequate. In recent years most pupils had reached or exceeded appropriate national levels of attainment in talking and in reading. The majority had done so in listening and in writing. There were signs of improvement in the levels attained at all stages in the current session. Most pupils talked confidently about a range of topics. In most classes, pupils' skills in receiving instructions or listening and responding to each other during discussions were not well developed. Pupils read regularly for enjoyment. At the early stages, most pupils were able to read aloud confidently. By the upper stages, most pupils were able to talk well about books they had read, and to express opinions on how writers had used language. Most pupils showed good standards of spelling and punctuation, and had an appropriate understanding of grammar. Most were able to write interesting and informative pieces on a range of topics. Pupils' skills in imaginative writing needed further development.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was adequate. In recent years, a majority of pupils had reached or exceeded appropriate national levels of attainment. There were signs of improvement in the current session in the levels attained by P7. Skills in handling data were generally well developed. Most pupils in the early stages were making good progress in understanding numbers. At the middle and upper stages, most pupils could carry out written and mental calculations accurately and had a good understanding of shapes. Some pupils had difficulties in remembering multiplication facts. In the upper stages, some pupils had difficulties with calculations involving pie-charts, decimals, fractions or percentages. All pupils had opportunities to tackle mathematical problems. Their skills in reporting on answers orally and in writing needed further development.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The school provided a high quality of pastoral care. Staff knew the pupils well and were sensitive to their social and emotional needs. Appropriate arrangements were in place to ensure pupils' care and welfare. The depute headteacher maintained a rigorous and systematic overview of child protection arrangements, including training for staff. She helped to ensure that all relevant agencies worked together as necessary. The transition of pupils from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school was organised effectively. The school promoted healthy lifestyles well. In addition to vigorous physical education lessons, pupils benefited from active play at breaks and had opportunities to engage in a range of sports. An 'Eating for Health' assistant made a significant contribution to the school's health promotion programme and encouraged pupils to make healthy choices at meal times.

On the whole, class teachers made good provision for pupils with differing levels of prior attainment, particularly in English language and mathematics. They were

improving the way in which they assessed pupils' progress, but did not always assess pupils' writing skills appropriately to identify the next steps in their learning in this aspect. Working with support for learning specialists, teachers effectively identified pupils who required extra support. The specialists provided helpful and well balanced additional support to individuals and groups in classes and out-of-class, including work in language, mathematics and movement. With parental involvement they drew up helpful individualised educational programmes for some pupils. Most pupils receiving additional support were making good progress. Overall, pupils' learning needs were met well.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The school had very good accommodation. Classrooms were spacious and well furnished. Strengths included a range of general purpose areas, a gym with changing rooms, a library area and an ICT suite. There was suitable access for those with disabilities, and security arrangements were appropriate. Staff used the accommodation well.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Pupils, parents and staff had pride in the school. Staff and pupil morale was high. Relationships between teachers and pupils were good, but teachers did not always ensure that pupils remained attentive and focused on work throughout lessons. They needed to set and achieve higher expectations of pupils in this regard. A small number of pupils presented challenging behaviour. Teachers were increasingly monitoring and recording pupils' progress and setting appropriate expectations for pupils' attainment. Assemblies were used well to promote and acknowledge pupil achievements and for appropriate religious observance. Pupils achieved widely in a range of out-of-class activities including sporting and artistic endeavours. Pupils were treated fairly. They had good opportunities to take responsibilities through the pupil council and other aspects including buddying schemes. Staff actively promoted the importance of valuing racial and other forms of diversity. The school was very good at ensuring that all pupils had equal opportunities to be included in its work.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Links with parents and the community were well developed. Parents of younger pupils could be involved through the soft start scheme in which they joined activities for a brief period at the beginning of the school day. The school was taking good steps to ensure that parents could help their children with ICT work at home. Parents were kept well informed through regular newsletters, reports on their children's progress and meetings. A recently formed parent consultative group was helping to build stronger links with the parent body. There was a supportive parent-school association. The school had built up a wide range of links with the local and wider community, including the chaplain, community police and a local further education college, which was helping the school in its drive to be eco-friendly.

## 7. Improving the school

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

The school was developing a good capacity for further improvement. There were signs of an improvement in levels of attainment in English language and mathematics in the current session. While the curriculum was very good, the quality of learning and teaching was variable. Pupils were well looked after, and wider achievements were promoted successfully.

Leadership in the school was good. In her time in post, the headteacher had improved various aspects of the school's work, including staff morale and teamwork. She had gained the respect of staff, parents and pupils. Working with staff, she had ensured that programmes of work were being improved in a systematic way. The headteacher was well supported by the deputy headteacher who carried out her remit, including overseeing child protection arrangements, effectively. Together with staff, the senior management team employed a range of approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's work. Teachers' lesson plans and pupils' written work were scrutinised regularly. The headteacher observed lessons and gave teachers written feedback. However, despite all these approaches, inconsistency in the quality of learning, teaching and attainment had not yet been fully identified or addressed.

**Main points for action**

The school and education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the work of the school. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- raise attainment in English language and mathematics;
- improve the quality of pupils' learning by ensuring that they are fully involved and attentive in lessons and that they benefit from a wider range of learning activities; and
- improve the effectiveness of monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the quality of the school's work.

**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.

Douglas Cairns  
HM Inspector

13 June 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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
Structure of the curriculum	Very Good
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Adequate

<b>How well are pupils supported?</b>	
Pastoral care	Very Good
Meeting pupils' needs	Good

<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Accommodation and facilities	Very Good
Climate and relationships	Good
Expectations and promoting achievement	Good
Equality and fairness	Very Good
Partnership with parents and the community	Very Good

<b>Improving the school</b>	
Leadership	Good
Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities	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 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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School reports gave them helpful information about their children's progress.</li> <li>• Parents' evenings were helpful and informative.</li> <li>• Staff made them feel welcome in the school.</li> <li>• Staff showed care and concern for the welfare of their children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how parents could help their children with homework.</li> <li>• Explain to them the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils.</li> </ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers helped them when they had difficulties in their work.</li> <li>• The school helped them to keep safe and healthy.</li> <li>• Pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better.</li> <li>• Teachers told them when they had done something well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the behaviour of pupils.</li> </ul>
<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, staff were pleased with almost all aspects of the school's work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>

## **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 Education, 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, 1st Floor, Endeavour House, 1 Greenmarket Dundee DD1 4QB or by telephoning 01382 576700. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **If you wish to comment about primary inspections**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, Acting HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

### **Our complaints procedure**

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail [enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk).

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