

**Mortlach Primary School  
Dufftown  
Moray Council  
14 February 2006**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Key strengths</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5. How well are pupils supported?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6. How good is the environment for learning?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7. Improving the school</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Indicators of quality</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>How can you contact us?</b>	<b>11</b>

## 1. Background

Mortlach Primary School was inspected in November 2005 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-teacher association, and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

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 village of Dufftown and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 184, including 22 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below 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.

- Courteous and well behaved pupils.
- The overall ethos in the school.
- Examples of high quality teaching.
- The inclusion of all pupils with additional support needs in the life of the school.
- Effective use of very well organised accommodation.

---

<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 a sample of parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Most parents were positive about most aspects of the work of the school. They believed their children enjoyed being in school and were treated fairly. They felt there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils, and that teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. They found parents' evenings helpful but wanted more information about the overall life of the school and the standards of work expected of pupils. Almost all pupils enjoyed being in school and felt that they were treated fairly. They believed they were expected to work hard, but also that they were helped when they were having difficulties. They felt that the school dealt very effectively with any incidents of bullying. About a quarter of them were concerned, however, about other pupils' behaviour. Staff liked working in the school, which they believed was well led. They felt they showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils and that they regularly celebrated pupils' successes. They were concerned about overall communications within the school and wished to see the headteacher more frequently in their classes. Support staff were concerned about their lack of involvement in decision-making.

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

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

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. The school had increased the time given to the teaching of English language and mathematics and, overall, this had helped raise pupils' attainment in these areas. The implementation of a programme for the teaching of writing had also been beneficial. An accelerated reading initiative was having a positive effect on encouraging pupils to read. The school had used its devolved budget well to increase the time pupils spent on physical education and music. Pupils were also encouraged to be more active and fit through the activities of a local Active Sports Coordinator and Youth Sports Development Worker. The overall quality of teaching in the school was good. There were many examples of very good direct teaching. In particular, the teaching of aspects of mathematics in P2 and P7 were models of very good practice. In the best practice teachers reviewed work previously done and shared with pupils what they expected them to learn. Teachers used praise frequently to motivate pupils and were largely successful. Teaching, however, was not well supported by assessment of pupils' needs or by programmes of study which would ensure progression in pupils' acquisition of skills and knowledge. While homework was set regularly it lacked variety.

Overall, pupils were well motivated and mainly enthusiastic learners. They worked well together when in groups and, at the upper stages, were encouraged to think and make decisions for themselves. Pupils in P1 were developing good social skills through well organised play activities. Across the school the pace of some of the work was too slow. In addition, several of the activities set for pupils were inappropriate and pupils were given too few opportunities to think for themselves. As a result a significant minority of pupils were not making sufficient progress in key areas of their learning. Throughout the school pupils were making good progress in physical education, and older pupils understood the necessity for fitness. The school had begun

to implement the education authority's science programme, in which pupils were introduced to observation in science experiments. However, there was a need to ensure that pupils gained an accurate view of what constituted scientific experiments. There were many examples of very good work done by pupils in art and design. Pupils were responding positively to teaching in information and communications technology, with pupils in P6 using a range of skills to create web pages.

The school encouraged pupils to achieve in a wide range of areas and develop positive attitudes towards others. Pupils throughout the school were involved in numerous enterprise activities which encouraged them to consider others. Some created and sold a magazine in aid of the tsunami disaster, while others performed at a musical evening for the local community. The school choir was successful in the local Moray music festival. Pupils from P5 to P7 had participated enthusiastically with Scottish Opera in putting on an opera and performing for parents and their friends.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Over the last three years overall attainment had improved. Almost all pupils at the early stages were achieving appropriate national levels in reading and writing. A small majority were achieving these in reading and writing at the middle stages. At the upper stages the majority were achieving national levels in reading, while most were achieving these in writing. A few pupils at the early and upper stages in particular were exceeding these levels. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. In almost all classes pupils listened attentively and responded well to questions and instructions. Almost all spoke clearly and confidently and showed a good sense of audience. Pupils were benefitting from an increased emphasis on the development of their reading skills. At the early and middle stages the majority of pupils made steady progress in their writing for a range of purposes. The quality of pupils' writing at the upper stages was improving and many wrote well organised pieces of prose. There was a need, however, to ensure that the standards expected of pupils' writing were emphasised across the curriculum. Standards in pupils' spelling were not high enough, and overall there was an over-reliance on textbook exercises.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils at the very early stages had made very good progress but this progress had not been well enough maintained as they progressed through the school. Throughout the school most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment but many were capable of achieving higher standards. Most pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. Pupils had a good knowledge of a range of graphs, but older pupils had not yet used computers to create graphs or use databases and spreadsheets. Pupils were accurate in written calculations but responded too slowly when asked to do mental calculations. They could measure accurately in tasks involving length and weight. Most had a good knowledge of shape and time. Pupils at P7 had a good understanding of how to tackle problems but, overall, pupils had too little experience of problem-solving and enquiry.

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

The quality of pastoral care was good. Staff knew their pupils well and were sensitive to their emotional and personal needs. Overall, they created a supportive learning environment for pupils. Although there were appropriate procedures in place for child protection, only support staff had been trained to use them. Appropriate systems were in place for the administration of medicines. The school had a clear policy on anti-bullying and staff dealt effectively with any incidents of misbehaviour. Pupils also understood what to do if they had any concerns or complaints. A programme for promoting positive behaviour was currently being improved. Staff promoted the benefits of healthy lifestyles effectively and pupils understood the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. However, the health education programme was not well enough developed. The school nurse was involved with sensitive aspects of the health education programme. The school itself was not sufficiently involved in this programme. The range of extra-curricular activities and enterprise activities contributed significantly to pupils' personal and social development.

Provision for meeting pupils' needs was adequate. Class teachers, classroom assistants and support for learning auxiliaries worked hard to support individual pupils. The school had very good arrangements for supporting pupils at times of transition, for example, when entering P1 and when transferring to secondary school. The school's arrangements for bringing together groups of pupils of similar abilities to teach English language was beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem and attainment. However, not all teachers provided sufficient challenge for all pupils. Able pupils were capable of achieving higher standards. Support for learning teachers gave effective support to pupils with their class work. Learning targets which were set within individualised educational programmes for those pupils experiencing difficulties were appropriate and helped staff meet their needs. Records of Need were regularly reviewed. Overall, however, support for learning staff were not well enough deployed. There was insufficient time made available for them to liaise with class teachers.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of the accommodation was very good. The staff had used all available space very effectively to support pupils' learning. Although some classrooms were small, they were well organised. Pupils' work was well used in classes to stimulate learning and help improve their self-esteem. Recent decoration of the dining room, and installation of a music system were contributing to a good quality social experience at lunch time. Play areas were extensive and provided very good space for pupils to be active. Security arrangements were appropriate. Aspects of the outdoor play area which were potentially hazardous were brought to the attention of the headteacher and education authority. Access for those with physical disabilities was good.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school had a very friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils were proud of their school and almost all wore uniform. They were courteous, and almost all were well behaved both in classes and in the play area. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff were very good. Pupils were treated with respect by staff and, in turn, respected staff. Catering staff took time to ensure that pupils received a healthy, balanced school lunch. Older pupils carried out a range of responsibilities effectively and, in doing so, were supportive of staff and younger pupils. A pupil council had begun to meet and was making good progress. Weekly assemblies provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance and for praising pupils for their achievements. The school was very well supported by local clergy. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour, but overall expectations of pupils and what they were capable of achieving were not high enough. Pupils with additional support needs were very well included in the overall life of the school. The school had yet to develop a clear programme on racial equality.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school was well supported by parents and the local community. Parents were active in raising substantial funds for the school in order to provide additional resources. The School Board met regularly and was supportive of the headteacher and staff. The school provided a written report to parents on pupils' progress once per year. These reports did not indicate what steps were to be taken to help pupils improve or how parents could help their children. Parents were invited to two helpful meetings per year to discuss their children's progress. However, parents received too little information about the curriculum or aspects of teaching and were not sufficiently involved with their children's learning. Parents were given insufficient information about potentially sensitive aspects of the school's health education programme. The school had good links with other schools in the associated school group. Social work staff also supported the school through working with pupils on aspects of social interaction and group discussion. The recent involvement of education authority staff in conducting an audit of the school had helped the headteacher and staff improve aspects of the school's provision.</p>

## 7. Improving the school

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

Overall, Mortlach Primary School provided a good quality of education for its pupils, but there was room for improvement. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was steadily improving. Relationships between staff and pupils were good and teachers taught well. Pupils and teachers were also very well supported by a range of support staff. The lack of a coherent structure for assessment and planning meant that not all teaching was well enough targeted to meet the needs of all pupils. Pupils with additional support needs were very well included in the life of the school. The structure for support for pupils, however, was not well enough organised.

The quality of the overall leadership and management in the school was good. The headteacher had been successful in leading a number of developments which had led to improved attainment in English language and mathematics. She had accepted the results of an audit of the school completed by the education authority and had begun to take the appropriate action to improve the school. She had successfully identified school priorities for development and the implementation of these had led to improvements for pupils. The management team in the school had recently been augmented with the appointment of two principal teachers. Their remits were appropriate and in the very short time they had been in post they had shown a

commitment to improvement. This enhanced management team had the potential to support staff and make changes within the school which would lead to pupils' needs being met more effectively. The headteacher monitored teachers' forward plans, sampled pupils' work and tracked pupils' attainment. She visited classes formally to review learning and teaching but did not visit classes frequently enough to support staff or pupils. However, the school had shown that, with the continued commitment of all staff and a clearer focus on meeting pupils' needs, it had the capacity to improve.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority should take action to improve the overall quality of learning and how well the needs of pupils were met. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- Improve the system of assessing, planning, tracking and predicting pupils' progress.
- Improve the pace of pupils' work and ensure that tasks set for pupils are sufficiently challenging.
- Review the system of support for pupils.
- Improve communications with parents and involve them more with their children's learning.
- Increase the frequency of visits to classes by the headteacher to support pupils and staff more effectively.

### **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.

Dr Roddy Duncan  
HM Inspector

14 February 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	Good
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Good

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

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

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

<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>• Their children enjoyed being in school and were treated fairly.</li> <li>• Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children, and there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and encouraged their children to work to the best of their ability.</li> <li>• Parents' evenings were helpful and informative, and school buildings were kept in good order.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents wanted more information about the standards of work expected from pupils, and how they could help their children with their homework.</li> <li>• A few parents did not think that the school dealt well with inappropriate behaviour.</li> <li>• A significant minority of parents were concerned about the overall leadership of the school.</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>• They enjoyed being in school, were treated fairly and had a say in deciding how to make the school better.</li> <li>• Teachers listened to them, explained things clearly and helped them when they had difficulties with classwork.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could, told them how they were getting on with their work, and knew them well.</li> <li>• They felt safe and well looked after in the school and staff helped them to keep safe and healthy.</li> <li>• Teachers checked their homework, and let them know how their learning could be improved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About a quarter of pupils surveyed were concerned about 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>• They set high standards for pupils' attainment, and gave pupils constructive feedback about their work.</li> <li>• They showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils, and regularly celebrated pupils' success.</li> <li>• They liked working in the school, and pupils were enthusiastic about their learning.</li> <li>• There was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> <li>• The school was well led and senior managers operated effectively as a team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications amongst staff, and also between senior managers and staff could be improved.</li> <li>• Staff thought that the time allocated for continuous professional development could be better used.</li> <li>• Teaching staff felt that the way the school dealt with pupils' indiscipline and behaviour could be improved.</li> <li>• Support staff did not believe they had sufficient opportunities to be involved in decision-making.</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 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, 28 Longman Road, Longman East, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. 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).

Crown Copyright 2006

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.