

**Portgordon Primary School
The Moray Council
13 June 2006**

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1. Background

Portgordon Primary School was inspected in February 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 a group of parents¹. There was no School Board. Two informal groups, a parents' forum and the Friends of Portgordon, met regularly to discuss the school's work and plan fundraising events.

The school serves the village of Portgordon and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 102, including 16 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 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 care, commitment and teamwork of all staff.
- The promotion of equality and fairness.
- Partnership with parents and the wider community.

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, pupils and staff were pleased with the work of the school. Parents stated that they felt welcome in school, thought that it had a good reputation in the local community and was well led. A few parents would have welcomed more information about the school's priorities for improvement. Pupils thought that teachers expected them to work hard and helped to keep them safe and healthy. Around a third of pupils felt that staff did not deal effectively with incidents of bullying. Just over a half of

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

pupils thought that the behaviour of other pupils was not good. Most pupils enjoyed being at school. Staff were positive about the school, felt that teamwork was effective and that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The structure of the school's curriculum was adequate. Staff provided pupils with a broad and balanced range of activities in most areas of the curriculum. These included an effective range of activities in science and in promoting pupils' awareness of what it means to be a good citizen. Programmes in a few areas lacked structure and did not ensure effective progression in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. These included the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and aspects of health education. Teachers set helpful homework and gave clear explanations. They used an appropriate range of teaching approaches, including working with the whole class, small groups and individuals. Teachers did not consistently question pupils effectively to check that pupils had understood what had been taught.

Most pupils responded enthusiastically to the tasks set for them. At all stages, a few pupils did not work well without direct supervision and were too easily distracted. Pupils were learning useful skills in cooperation by working together on a range of tasks. These included paired discussion in writing, group activities in physical education and practical measuring tasks in mathematics. At the early stages, pupils were developing their knowledge about aspects of science, including simple awareness of forms of energy. Throughout the school, pupils' skills in using ICT appropriately for a range of purposes were not yet sufficiently developed. In a few lessons, the pace of work was too slow for a few pupils.

School staff promoted effectively pupils' personal and social development through a range of stimulating activities. These included a 'Walkabout' club, run by school staff, to encourage pupils to take exercise and be more aware of their local area. Pupils had successfully participated in a national competition to tackle racism. Those at P3 to P7 were improving their awareness of what it means to be a good citizen through participation in the pupil council. At the upper stages, pupils had won first prize in an area environmental competition for their work on 'Dolphin Defenders'. Pupils had a good knowledge of the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise. The range of health promoting activities did not yet ensure that pupils had an appropriate knowledge of personal relationships.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was adequate. There had been no clear pattern of attainment in the previous three years. Most pupils, including those who were experiencing difficulties in aspects of English language, were making appropriate progress in their class work. At all stages, most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in reading and writing, but a few pupils in the upper stages could have achieved more. The school did not have robust evidence of pupils' attainment in listening and talking. Most pupils could respond appropriately to

information given by their teachers. Too many pupils had not yet developed good listening skills and did not respond appropriately to others in group discussions. In the early stages, pupils were progressing well in developing early reading skills and most read fluently from unfamiliar texts. In the middle and upper stages, pupils showed a good awareness of types of texts and how writers achieve their effects. At the early and middle stages, most pupils wrote effectively for a variety of purposes. By the upper stages, too few pupils had developed appropriate skills in writing.

Mathematics

Attainment in mathematics was adequate, with no clear pattern of attainment in recent years. At all stages, most pupils performed well in their class work. Most were achieving or exceeding appropriate national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. For a few pupils at all stages the pace of progress was too slow. Most pupils had an appropriate understanding of graphs. Their skills in using databases and spreadsheets to handle data were not yet well developed. Across the school, almost all pupils performed written calculations confidently and had an appropriate awareness of place value. At the upper stages, pupils showed a good understanding of decimals. Too many pupils at all stages were not sufficiently quick and accurate in carrying out mental calculations. Pupils at all stages could identify an appropriate range of shapes and angles. Those at the upper stages were aware of a range of problem solving strategies, but did not always apply these effectively. At the early and middle stages, pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry required improvement.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff cared for pupils well and the school had effective arrangements to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. All staff were appropriately informed about child protection procedures. The school had a range of helpful welfare policies and procedures to guide staff. These included guidance on child protection, racial equality, anti-bullying, and safe use of the Internet. The school's procedures for recording and reviewing incidents such as bullying or disruptive behaviour were not consistently systematic and rigorous.

Class teachers and support staff gave useful help to individual pupils. They knew pupils well and were responsive to their social and emotional needs. Teachers did not always take account of pupils' prior attainment to ensure that tasks presented appropriate challenge to meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, some higher attaining pupils were not sufficiently challenged. The recently appointed support for learning teacher provided appropriate assistance to a range of pupils with additional support needs. She consulted effectively with class teachers and the headteacher. She had prepared helpful individualised educational programmes for most pupils requiring additional support in their learning. The school had effective procedures to support pupils entering P1 and those transferring to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The overall quality of accommodation was good. The school was clean and well maintained and staff made effective use of displays of pupils' work. Pupils could access the Internet in class areas throughout the school. The school had appropriate secure entry arrangements and ample storage space. Pupils benefited from the use of a nearby community hall for physical education activities. Access to some parts of the school would be difficult for anyone with restricted mobility.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	The school had a positive climate, and relationships between staff and pupils were mostly good. Staff worked very well together as a team. At all stages, teachers and support staff offered caring assistance to a few pupils whose behaviour lacked appropriate consideration for others. Staff did not always succeed in preventing this behaviour from disrupting learning and teaching. All staff treated pupils fairly and equally. The headteacher and staff took very effective steps to promote racial equality and prepare pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society. The school had developed a promising system for rewarding pupils' achievements and pupils were responding well. Teachers did not yet have consistently high enough expectations of a few pupils' behaviour and attainment. Staff made good use of weekly assemblies for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' achievements.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had very good relationships with parents and the wider community. The headteacher had worked effectively with the parents' forum to discuss aspects of the school's work. The Friends of Portgordon provided valuable assistance in fund raising and parents had recently assisted at school events. The school used helpful booklets, including those issued by the education authority, to explain how parents could assist their children's learning. The headteacher had distributed an informative summary booklet to all parents outlining the school's priorities for improvement. She planned to consult with parents about sensitive health issues, when the health education programme was fully developed. Pupils benefited from the school's helpful links with the wider community. These included links with the local chaplain, the community policeman, a local farmer, and health professionals. School staff kept parents well informed through open meetings, regular newsletters, an informative school handbook, parents' evenings and yearly written reports on pupils' progress.

7. Improving the school

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

Portgordon Primary School had a number of strengths, which just outweighed weaknesses in provision. The committed staff worked effectively as a team and promoted pupils' skills in a range of areas. Most pupils behaved well but a few pupils did not always cooperate well with staff. Pupils were attaining adequate standards in English language and mathematics. A few pupils could have achieved more if staff had provided greater pace and challenge across a broader range of activities.

The headteacher had been in post since August 2004. She was very committed to the school and displayed a high level of professional competence and understanding. With the continuing support of the education authority, she had the capacity to further improve the school. She had brought about several improvements in the school's provision. These included improving the arrangements for planning pupils' work and developing aspects of pupils' personal and social development. She had improved the school environment and gained the trust and respect of parents, staff and pupils. However, progress in tackling long-term weaknesses in the curriculum and in monitoring pupils' attainment in key areas had been too slow. The recently appointed principal teacher offered valuable support to the headteacher and to the work of the school. The school's arrangements for evaluating the quality of its work were weak. The headteacher provided helpful written comments on teachers' plans and met regularly with staff to discuss the school's work. She had not yet sampled pupils' work systematically or visited classes to observe the quality of learning

and teaching. School staff did not make consistently effective use of assessment information to track pupils' progress. As a result, a few pupils had not made appropriate progress in their learning.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve learning, teaching and attainment. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- improve attainment in English language and mathematics;
- improve the structure of the curriculum to ensure that all pupils develop appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills;
- improve the pace and challenge in learning and teaching to ensure that all pupils' needs are met effectively; and
- improve the arrangements for evaluating the quality of learning, teaching and attainment to ensure that all pupils make appropriate progress.

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.

Robert Barfoot
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.

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

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Good
Meeting pupils' needs	Adequate

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	Adequate
Self-evaluation	Weak

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"> • Parents were positive about all aspects of the school's provision. • Staff made them feel welcome in school and provided helpful information about their children's progress. • Staff consulted them effectively about decisions affecting their children. • The school had a good reputation in the local community and was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents thought that they did not receive enough information about the school's priorities for improvement.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers gave clear explanations and expected them to work as hard as they could. • Teachers helped them when they were having difficulties with their school work and told them when they had done something well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around half of the pupils did not think that the behaviour of other pupils was good. • Around a third of pupils did not think staff were good at dealing with incidents of bullying.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff had no significant concerns.

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 01643 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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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.

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. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

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