

**Stenhousemuir Primary School
Larbert
Falkirk Council
25 April 2006**

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1. Background

Stenhousemuir Primary School was inspected in January 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, the Eco Committee and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson and representatives of the School Board, representatives of the Friends of Stenhousemuir Primary School (the parent-teacher association), the school chaplain and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the Stenhousemuir area of Falkirk. At the time of the inspection the roll was 613, including eight pupils with identified additional needs who received enhanced support. 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.

At the time of the inspection, the school was in the process of appointing a new management team and the headteacher had adapted remits temporarily until the permanent posts were filled. An acting deputy headteacher and acting principal teachers had been appointed very recently and were due to take up their duties in the week following the inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' progress at the early stages through their active engagement in high quality learning experiences.
- Ways in which pupils with additional learning needs were supported and the care and welfare the school provided for all pupils.
- Positive relationships and commitment between staff, pupils, parents and others involved with the school.
- The school's partnership with parents, the School Board and the community which was having a positive impact on pupils' broader learning experiences.
- Leadership of the headteacher, particularly in managing change.

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 were satisfied with almost all aspects of the school. All felt that their children were treated fairly and were well cared for. They commented that there was mutual respect between staff and their children. A few wanted more information on their children's progress and the standards of work expected from them. Parents were concerned about the traffic flow of vehicles when 'dropping off' and collecting their children. Pupils were happy with almost all aspects of provision. They felt teachers expected them to work as hard as they could, helped them when they had difficulties and checked their homework. A minority wanted the school to be better at dealing with bullying and for pupils' behaviour to improve. Staff were content with almost all aspects of the school. They felt the school was well led and that pupils' successes were celebrated regularly. Teachers were pleased to be involved with school initiatives. A few felt the pace of change was sometimes too brisk. A few members of staff thought that indiscipline and pupils' behaviour could be dealt with more effectively.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum provided pupils with broad and balanced experiences. Staff had allocated additional time to English language and mathematics with a view to raising pupils' attainment. This was having an impact on pupils' experiences in reading. However, the middle and upper stages had still to make gains in aspects of mathematics and writing. Early intervention programmes in literacy and numeracy were having a positive impact on pupils' skills and knowledge at P1 and P2. Visiting staff in physical education (PE) provided effective support in developing pupils' skills. Staff made good use of people and places within the local community to enhance the quality of pupils' learning experiences, for example in aspects of dance and religious and moral education. Teachers had correctly identified the need to review and improve their approaches to delivering the curriculum in English language and in mathematics. In a few classes, staff did not integrate information and communications technology (ICT) sufficiently into pupils' curricular experiences. The overall quality of teaching was good. Interactions between teachers and pupils were positive. In most classes, teachers questioned pupils effectively to challenge and extend their learning. They listened to pupils' responses and actively promoted and valued their contributions to class lessons and discussions. They shared the purpose of lessons, explained ideas well and provided clear instructions. However, this practice was not consistent throughout the school. Staff were succeeding in making homework more relevant and interesting in supporting pupils' learning.

At P1 and P2, pupils concentrated well and were keen to learn. They focused well and were enthusiastic and very imaginative when experimenting and investigating during effective and appropriate structured play sessions. Throughout the school, pupils were beginning to evaluate their own and other pupils' learning and worked well together in

pairs. At P6, pupils engaged enthusiastically and made good progress in dance and fitness routines when learning about African dance. When given the opportunity, pupils enjoyed and responded well to challenges set for them. However, at the middle and upper stages, pupils did not have enough opportunities to work independently or take sufficient responsibility for organising their learning. At a few stages, the pace of learning was variable and pupils were not making consistently good progress in their learning. At times, it was too brisk and pupils did not have sufficient time to consolidate their learning. Overall, the quality of pupils' learning was adequate.

Pupils' were achieving success in personal and social development and in PE. They had enthusiastically taken part in events, including a 'mathematics challenge' and 'murderous maths' activity. Pupils were developing their abilities in ICT through attendance at a web design club. The school had achieved success in a recent council ICT competition. Pupils enjoyed developing various skills through taking part in a range of activities after school, including football, country dancing and a story telling club. Elected representatives from P4 to P7 made positive contributions to the life of the school through the work of the pupil council. They were aware of their responsibilities, extended their skills as citizens and consulted well with other pupils. At P1 to P3, younger pupils used circle time well to share views and opinions on aspects of the school. Pupils in the upper stages contributed effectively to projects linked to their involvement on an Eco School committee through recycling and nature activities. They were developing appropriate enterprise skills, including raising funds for local and international charities and for the school.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Over the last three years, standards of attainment in reading had improved. However, there had been a slight decline in writing. Most pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. A significant minority achieved these levels earlier than expected. Across the school, pupils with additional support needs made good progress. At P1 and P2, pupils had made a very good start to developing their early literacy skills. Across the stages, most pupils listened attentively and responded appropriately. Almost all were confident when talking and expressed themselves well. In discussions with adults, they responded appropriately by offering their own ideas or supporting the opinions of others. Most read fluently and talked enthusiastically about books they had read. Pupils' attainment in writing was adequate. At most stages, they wrote for a variety of purposes, including story writing and poetry. However, their standards of presentation were variable. Pupils' writing was not always of a sufficient length. They did not always write enough detail or structure their work appropriately.

Mathematics

The overall quality in mathematics was adequate. Over the last three years, there had been no significant trends in the standards of attainment. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. A few had achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress in their coursework. Pupils could accurately interpret a range of graphs appropriate to their stage of development. However, they did not make enough use of

ICT in information handling and in using databases. Throughout the school, most pupils were proficient in carrying out written calculations. They were not sufficiently skilled with methods of mental calculation. At a few stages, pupils had difficulties with aspects of measurement. Most pupils were competent with fractions and decimals. Pupils demonstrated a good understanding of shapes and angles. In particular, pupils at the early stages were able to quickly and accurately identify shapes. Across the school, pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry were limited. They were making insufficient progress with this aspect of mathematics.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff provided very good levels of support for pupils' care and welfare and were sensitive to their needs. They promoted effectively pupils' positive behaviour through implementing appropriate procedures for child protection and to prevent bullying. The headteacher had reviewed and improved arrangements to deal with incidents where children's safety might be at risk, including the use of 'bubble time' and 'good ideas boxes'. Working with staff, parents, children and local residents, the headteacher was actively investigating safer routes to school for pupils. As a result, pupils enjoyed school and felt safe. Older pupils supported younger pupils in the playground. The school made appropriate provision for health education and education about personal relationships. Pupils were encouraged to develop an awareness of health and wellbeing.

The school's approaches to meeting pupils' needs were good. Overall, teachers matched tasks and resources appropriately to pupils' abilities and aptitudes. However, they did not consistently differentiate or challenge more able pupils. At the early stages, staff provided a very good range of activities which were meeting pupils' needs effectively. Almost all pupils with additional support needs within the school and in the enhanced provision were making good or very good progress. The headteacher provided direction and clear advice and guidance to staff which assisted them in meeting pupils' needs. The learning support teacher and classroom assistants worked well with class teachers and provided strong support for pupils. A wide range of agencies contributed effectively to ensuring specific pupils' needs were suitably addressed. This included strong support from the teacher of English as an additional language and effective input from speech and language therapists and family support workers. Educational psychology, occupational therapy and community support staff also assisted them appropriately to meet pupils' needs. The school had very good arrangements to support pupils at points of transfer from pre-school into P1 and from P7 into secondary.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>Overall, the quality of accommodation and facilities was good. The school provided a welcoming environment and had appropriate arrangements for monitoring school security. Facilities were accessible and modified for individuals with physical difficulties. The external fabric of the main building had been well maintained. Temporary accommodation located in the playground was nearing the end of its life. Pupils had good access to supervised and extensive playground areas. In inclement weather, they were unable to use grassed areas and the remaining space was limited. Pupils' toilets were not in a good state of repair. Despite restricted parking facilities for parents, the headteacher had put in place appropriate measures to promote children's safety.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Pupils had positive attitudes towards each other and almost all were well behaved. Staff regularly celebrated pupils' achievements and successes through, for example, use of achievement boards in classes and displays in the reception area. Their expectations of pupils' attainment were variable. Pupils were not always aware of their strengths and areas for development. Staff encouraged pupils to develop positive attitudes, tolerance and mutual respect for cultural and racial differences. They encouraged pupils through environmental studies to be aware of global issues, including poverty and fair trading. They were effectively developing pupils' awareness of equality of opportunity, inclusion and social responsibility. School assemblies provided regular opportunities for religious observance and the celebration of pupils' successes.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>Staff had established a very good partnership with parents, the School Board and the Friends of Stenhousemuir Primary School. The headteacher used this partnership effectively to consult with parents on sensitive issues such as health. She was developing ways to involve parents more in their children's learning. The school kept parents well informed through newsletters, parents' evenings and helpful reports on their children's progress. The headteacher had surveyed parents' views and taken action to address their issues.</p> <p>With parents, the school had successfully raised money for charities and for members of their own community. Regular visits from the local chaplain enabled pupils to learn more about the impact of their fundraising activities, both locally and internationally. School links with local businesses and organisations within the community enhanced pupils' knowledge and understanding of citizenship and enterprise. Staff used effective contacts with the Falkirk Arts and Social Inclusion Coordinator and a choreographer from Zimbabwe to provide additional experiences for pupils.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

The headteacher and staff had established a positive, caring and inclusive learning environment. Pupils were polite, hard working and almost all were well behaved. They engaged in a range of activities which successfully promoted their wellbeing and personal and social development. Their skills were being effectively developed through school links and contacts with various partnerships within the community. The quality of teaching was good. Although there were strengths in pupils' learning there were some weaknesses. Pupils needed to take more consistent responsibility for their own learning and have increased opportunities to be independent. Staff provided very effective support for pupils requiring enhanced assistance with their learning. Throughout the school, pupils' attainment in reading was good. Their attainment in mathematics and writing was adequate. Staff needed to continue to address these shortcomings by providing more appropriate levels of support and challenge to pupils and through improving the pace of learning.

The headteacher provided the school with very good leadership. She had a clear vision for improving the school and was enthusiastic and very well respected by staff and pupils. The headteacher had developed a very good partnership with parents and was being successful in involving them more in their children's learning. She kept the large staff well informed and used their skills and expertise to further school improvement. The deputy headteacher assisted the headteacher in monitoring class practice. The very recently appointed acting deputy headteacher and acting principal teachers had not

taken up their new duties. Although the headteacher was appropriately developing ways to assist staff with learning and teaching, promoted staff had not yet been able to provide enough support in classes to help teachers improve practice. The school's arrangements for self-evaluation and quality assurance were good. The headteacher had played a key role in the school retaining 'Investors in People' for a second period of time. She engaged staff in regularly reviewing the school's work, including classroom practice and had appropriately involved them in identifying strengths and areas for development. The newly formed senior management team now needed to work with staff in classes to improve practice and engage them more meaningfully in self-evaluation. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, the school had the capacity to improve pupils' learning experiences and ensure more consistency throughout the school.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve learning and attainment in order to meet pupils needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- raise attainment in mathematics and English language, particularly in writing;
- share effective practice across the school to ensure consistently challenging and appropriate learning experiences for all pupils;
- provide more guidance and support to class teachers on learning and teaching; and
- ensure that promoted staff work with staff in classes to improve practice and engage them more meaningfully in self-evaluation.

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.

Moira Cummings
HM Inspector

25 April 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	Good
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Adequate

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

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

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff made them feel welcome and the school had a good reputation in the community. • Staff ensured that their children enjoyed school. • Staff explained how they could support their children with homework. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few felt school reports could provide them with more information on their children's progress. • A few wanted the school to be clearer about the standards of work expected from their children. • A few commented that staff could tell them more about their plans for improving the school.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could. • School was enjoyable and staff kept them safe and healthy. • They were pleased that teachers told them how they were doing with their work. • Teachers told them when they did well and helped them with problems. • Teachers checked their homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant minority felt that the school could be better at dealing with behaviour. • A fifth reported that the school could be better at managing incidents of bullying. • A few felt they could be treated more fairly in school.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all staff felt that the school was well led. • All commented that pupils received feedback on their work. • All staff reported that they set high standards for pupils' attainment. • All felt that pupil success was celebrated regularly. • All stated that they worked hard to maintain good relations with the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most support staff and a few teaching staff wanted indiscipline to be dealt with more effectively. • A few staff wanted pupils' behaviour to improve. • The majority of support staff wanted more mutual respect between themselves and pupils.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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