

**Tomintoul Primary School
The Moray Council
14 November 2006**

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1. Background

Tomintoul 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 its 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 at the time of the inspection.

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 Tomintoul and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 64, including nine 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.

Tomintoul Primary School had undergone significant staff changes in the past year. Almost all current teaching staff had taken up post within the past twelve months and all had less than three years teaching experience. The headteacher had returned to the school in 2005 following a one year period of secondment to a development post in the education authority. She had been on sick leave from November 2005 to December 2005.

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

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Staff's attention to promoting pupils' skills in physical education.
- Teaching and support staff's good use of the extensive grounds to promote learning and support pupils' play.

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

Overall, parents were not satisfied with many aspects of the work of the school. They were pleased with the school's accommodation. They found parents' evenings helpful. The majority of parents thought that the school had a poor reputation in the community. Half of the parents felt that the school did not clearly inform them of their children's strengths and weaknesses. They felt that inappropriate behaviour was not always dealt with effectively. A few parents raised concerns over incidents which they felt the school had not managed well. Pupils believed that teachers expected them to work hard and felt that staff knew them well. Almost a quarter of pupils who responded believed that the behaviour of a few pupils was not good. A similar proportion did not think that pupils were treated fairly in school. Staff were pleased with all aspects of the work of the school and enjoyed working there. They believed that the school had improved over the past year.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school did not provide pupils with a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. There was insufficient time given to some curricular areas. Staff had allocated additional time to the teaching of English language and mathematics with a view to raising attainment. This time was not always used effectively and the impact of this initiative on pupils' learning was not sufficiently monitored. Staff gave pupils at all stages very good opportunities to develop their skills in physical education. Teachers had yet to make good use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support learning across the curriculum. Teaching approaches were not sufficiently varied and there were too few examples of good direct teaching. Teachers were often unclear about what they wanted pupils to learn and they relied too heavily on work from textbooks or worksheets. Too many lessons lacked structure and did not systematically build on pupils' prior learning. Teachers' explanations were often too vague and pupils required further support to complete tasks. Teachers' use of praise was not always effective. They did not make good use of questioning to assess pupils' understanding or to challenge pupils' thinking. Homework was not sufficiently varied and was too infrequent at the upper stages.

Pupils were too passive in their learning and too many lacked motivation. Generally tasks set for pupils were repetitive. Pupils were not always clear about the purpose of lessons. Most pupils were unsure of their levels of attainment and were unclear about what they needed to do to improve their work. The pace of almost all lessons was too slow and tasks lacked appropriate challenge. At times the poor behaviour of a few pupils disrupted learning. Pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to work collaboratively or take responsibility for their learning. In music, most pupils in P5 and P6 showed skill in performing. At all stages, pupils enthusiastically participated in an athletic awards scheme and most pupils showed good physical skills.

Across the school, most pupils were self-confident and had good social skills. The majority of pupils displayed positive attitudes and self-discipline. A few pupils did not show respect for teachers or for other pupils. Pupils were developing citizenship skills by taking responsibility for specific duties around the school, including older pupils ‘buddying’ younger ones in the playground. The pupil council had successfully organised a sponsored walk at the start of the year. It had met too infrequently and was not fully effective. Pupils from P3 to P7 participated in *Stay and Play*, an after-school activity. Pupils in P5 and P6 were making good progress in learning to play the recorder. Pupils at the middle stages were actively involved in developing the school garden and the school had achieved silver Eco School status.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was unsatisfactory. The majority of pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking and reading and less than half were achieving these levels in writing. Pupils’ attainment in coursework had major weaknesses and most pupils were capable of achieving higher standards, particularly in writing. Pupils who required additional support with aspects of their English language work were making insufficient progress towards meeting their individual learning targets. At all stages, the majority of pupils listened attentively to instructions. Most talked confidently but their skills in talking in groups were not well developed. Across the school, most pupils read with confidence but were not making sufficient progress in developing reading skills. Pupils did not read widely for pleasure and had too few opportunities to discuss texts. At P7, pupils were unable to talk about their favourite authors or the types of books they preferred to read. Pupils in the middle and upper stages demonstrated a good understanding of punctuation in focused lessons but did not use this knowledge in their everyday writing. Across the school, the quality of pupils’ spelling was not appropriately accurate and most pupils did not present sufficiently neat written work.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was weak. The majority of pupils were attaining appropriate national levels. For too many pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Pupils not attaining national levels were making insufficient progress in their learning and had not received appropriate additional support. Pupils at the early stages were not being sufficiently challenged and had made a slow start to acquiring skills in mental and written calculation. In information handling, most pupils could interpret data but they were not secure in collecting, organising and displaying data. Those in P6 and P7 showed limited understanding of the use of databases and spreadsheets. Pupils from P3 to P7 had a good understanding of number but too many pupils were unable to respond promptly to mental calculation tasks. At P6 and P7, pupils did not have a secure understanding in many aspects of number and measurement, including decimals, fractions and volume. Pupils in P3 had a sound grasp of the properties of three-dimensional shapes but those at the upper stages had difficulty in working accurately with shapes and angles. Across all stages, pupils’ skills in problem-solving and enquiry were not sufficiently developed.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Overall, the quality of pastoral care was weak. The school had a range of procedures to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils but staff did not always implement these effectively. The school was making a good start to encouraging pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle. School lunches were of good quality and well presented, and they were popular with pupils. The daily tuck shop sold a range of well chosen products, including fresh fruit. Pupils felt safe in the school but were not always confident that they could discuss sensitive issues or concerns with staff. There were effective procedures in place for pupils entering P1 and for pupils in P7 transferring to Speyside High School.

Arrangements to meet pupils' learning needs were unsatisfactory. Staff employed insufficient strategies to ensure the needs of individual pupils were met. The majority of pupils did not perform well in tasks set by their teachers. The nature of some tasks and the pace of work were not well-matched to the learning needs of a significant number of pupils. Staff did not make effective use of assessment to identify gaps in pupils' learning and plan appropriately to address these well. Teachers did not share learning targets with pupils. The support for learning teacher provided helpful support for pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning. However, he did not work alongside teachers in the classroom on a sufficiently regular basis to support pupils' learning needs and ensure continuity in pupils' learning. Staff had developed individualised educational programmes for pupils with additional support needs, but these were not always used effectively to support pupils' learning. Classroom assistants were not always deployed effectively to assist pupils in class.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good overall. The school building provided a safe and secure environment with disabled access. The classrooms were spacious and bright and staff made effective use of available space. Staff used the gym hall well to promote pupils' skills in physical education. Corridors within the school were not well lit. Pupils benefited from the good use of an extensive play area within the school grounds.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	The atmosphere in school was relaxed but not consistently purposeful. The reception of visitors was well organised. The relationships between staff and pupils were not always positive. Staff's expectations of pupils' achievement and behaviour were not always sufficiently high. The school had not been effective in developing pupils' sense of fairness, equality and tolerance of others. Discussion about equality issues was not well planned and boys and girls were not always treated equally and fairly in the upper school. Pupils' successes were celebrated at school assemblies, which also provided regular opportunities for religious observance.
Partnership with parents and the community	The school's partnership with parents and the wider community had important weaknesses. The school had developed good partnerships with a few parents but had yet to develop positive links with others. The school issued useful guidance to parents on the curriculum and on sensitive health education issues. Parents received regular newsletters about the work of the school but there was scope to improve presentation. Parents found parents' evenings helpful. Written reports to parents on pupils' progress were not always informative. Overall, the school had not sufficiently involved parents in supporting their children's learning and the wider work of the school. The local minister and priest visited the school on a monthly basis to support school assemblies.

7. Improving the school

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

Tomintoul Primary School had undergone significant staff changes in the past year. All class teachers were inexperienced. They had not received sufficiently effective guidance or support from the headteacher on delivering an appropriate learning experience for pupils. Education authority curriculum support officers had recently provided helpful support in mathematics and writing. Pupils' attainment was unsatisfactory in English language and weak in mathematics. The quality of learning and teaching was unsatisfactory. The school did not have sufficiently high expectations of pupils' achievements and there were major weaknesses in meeting the needs of pupils. There were relationship difficulties between staff and parents and amongst some members of staff. The school's capacity to improve, without substantial support from the education authority, had major weaknesses.

The headteacher had been in post for 10 years. She had returned to the school in 2005 following a one year period of secondment to a development post in the education authority. She demonstrated a good degree of professional competence based on relevant knowledge but she had yet to successfully apply this in practical contexts within the school.

She had not provided a strategic direction for the school and had not yet demonstrated the leadership necessary to bring about improvement, particularly in relation to pupils' learning. The headteacher had experienced difficulties in handling a number of challenging and sensitive situations. The school had an appropriate range of systems for monitoring and evaluating its work but had yet to use these with sufficient rigour to raise attainment or improve pupils' learning experiences. Teachers did not monitor pupils' progress effectively or provide appropriate learning activities to meet pupils' learning needs. Staff were not given sufficient feedback on their practice or support in the classroom. They now required to be involved in the self-evaluation process, to help identify and agree the priorities for action which would bring about necessary improvement.

Main points for action

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvement in:

- the quality of teaching, to ensure that all pupils' learning needs are met effectively;
- the quality of pupils' learning experiences;
- attainment in English language and mathematics;
- the school's climate and relationships and ethos of achievement;
- the leadership of the school; and
- self-evaluation and the school's capacity to improve.

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. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority to monitor progress. They will publish an interim report on progress within one year of the publication of this report. Thereafter, HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Belinda Sheehan
HM Inspector

14 November 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	weak
The teaching process	unsatisfactory
Pupils' learning experiences	unsatisfactory
Pupils' attainment in English language	unsatisfactory
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	weak

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	weak
Meeting pupils' needs	unsatisfactory

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	unsatisfactory
Self-evaluation	unsatisfactory

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. Where any one group had five or less respondents then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided helpful information in pupils' reports and at parents' evenings. • Staff made them feel welcome in school. • Kept school buildings in good order. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the school's reputation in the community and deal more effectively with concerns raised. • Provide clear information on the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils and the standard of work it expects. • Improve pastoral care and deal more effectively with inappropriate behaviour. • Provide parents with clear guidance on helping with homework and more information about their children's strengths and weaknesses. • Improve relationships in school and provide more effective leadership. • Have higher expectations of pupils and provide more stimulating and challenging work.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers knew them well. • Teachers expected them to work hard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to pupils and treat them all fairly. • Deal more effectively with bullying. • Help pupils to feel safe in school and help them sort out things that upset them. • Tell pupils when they have done something well and how they can improve their learning.

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, Longman East, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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