



**Blackford Primary School  
Perth and Kinross Council  
23 August 2011**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMI) inspects schools in order to let parents<sup>1</sup>, children and the local community know whether their school<sup>2</sup> provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which children are involved. We also gather the views of children, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well children are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support children. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from children, parents and staff. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals.

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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.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'school' includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate.

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### **1. The school**

Blackford Primary School is a non-denominational school. It serves the village of Blackford. The roll was 47 when the inspection was carried out in June 2011. Children's attendance was above the national average in 2009/2010. A new headteacher was appointed in August 2010 and went on leave in February 2011. An acting headteacher has been in post since that time in a shared headship with another local primary school.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Confident children with a pride in their school and community.
- The headteacher's and acting headteacher's clear leadership and direction.
- Children's achievements in and beyond the classroom including through outdoor learning and links with the local community.
- Staff willingness and contribution to improving children's learning.

## **3. How well do children learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

Almost all children are keen and motivated to learn. They feel successful and confident that they are making progress in their learning. Almost all feel safe, respected and well cared for. They are becoming active contributors to the life of the school through the various action groups. They contribute effectively to a strong community in Blackford. Children need more opportunities to discuss and reflect on their learning with others. They need more consistent, clear and regular feedback from staff. Learning in groups, where children are given more responsibility, needs to continue to be a focus.

Children have well-developed opportunities to achieve through cultural, community, sporting and outdoor learning activities. Many children perform well to live audiences in events such as the gala day and annual concert. They enjoy competing in sporting events with children from other local schools. All children have achieved a Heartstart first aid award appropriate to their age. Children in P4 are developing their skills and confidence to swim as part of the education authority's commitment to enhancing levels of physical activity. There

are well-planned progressive opportunities for children to learn outdoors about Scotland's natural heritage which include, for example, a residential stay for P7.

Almost all children are making good progress in English language. They talk well in small groups but need to develop better listening skills, particularly when listening to instructions. They read with appropriate understanding and are developing well their ability to read with expression. Children in the middle and upper stages are developing an appropriate range of reading skills. Children write at length for a wide range of reasons. Almost all apply their knowledge of spelling and grammar well. Most children are making satisfactory progress and perform consistently well in mathematics. A few children at each stage make very good progress. At the early stages, they are making a promising start to their early number work. Children in the middle and upper stages have a very good understanding of angles and bearings and the language of mathematics. By P7 they show confidence in working with decimals, fractions and percentages. They are not so secure with calculations involving volume and measure. Overall they need more opportunities to present and interpret information from charts and graphs and to solve problems using a range of strategies in both familiar and unfamiliar situations. Children who need additional support are making appropriate progress.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

The curriculum is broad and provides opportunities for children to learn across different curricular areas. Staff are developing more interesting contexts for children to learn. They have begun to plan the development of children's literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing more carefully. Children benefit from two hours of good-quality physical education each week. From P5 they learn to communicate in German. The *Band Hero Project* is helping children in P7 to integrate well into life at the Community School of Auchterarder. Curricular programmes need to be redesigned to include more relevant and practical tasks which do not rely so heavily on text books. Science and technologies should be given more prominence. Children need

increased opportunities to learn through play. Teachers are developing their confidence in using Curriculum for Excellence and now need a more detailed plan for taking it forward. Staff need a better approach for ensuring that children build on their previous learning as they progress from stage to stage, and as they move from nursery into P1.

In the majority of lessons, appropriate tasks and activities engage children for most of the time. Clear, well-understood and documented procedures help staff identify, assess and make appropriate plans for children who require additional support in their learning. Teachers are familiar with children's additional support needs and with any difficulties they may be facing. Staff need to make better use of this information when planning some of their lessons. This will help make sure that tasks are pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty for all children. Support plans for children who have identified learning needs have meaningful targets and are reviewed regularly. Support staff provide effective help for children in class, but the school should review how flexibly they are deployed to ensure maximum impact on children's progress. In a few lessons, teachers' introductions, explanations and rounding up sessions are too long and reduce time for learning. Staff should continue to explore more relevant contexts for children's learning to increase their levels of motivation and interest. Homework is regular but could be more varied and challenging through the planning of more open-ended tasks.

#### **4. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?**

The school works very well with a range of different groups, services and agencies. Staff liaise with educational psychologists, speech and language therapy, social work and mental health staff to help those children who need additional support. The community link worker and Active Schools coordinator play very effective roles in, amongst other things, ensuring a smooth transition to secondary school. Links to local community groups including the Church are extensive. The

school has established supportive links with village businesses to help children's understanding of the world of work. Staff work well with other schools in the local management group to share practice and to begin to moderate standards. There is an effective and very supportive parents-staff association which is seeking to form a Parent Council to formalise its involvement. Parents help to extend children's experience of outdoor learning and the school cook helps to develop children's practical cookery skills and knowledge. Curricular links with the secondary school need to be strengthened.

## **5. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?**

Staff and children are well engaged in the life and work of the school and help to bring about improvements. All children are involved in one of a range of action groups which cover many aspects of school life such as health, safety, gardening and website developments. Staff take on lead responsibilities for aspects such as literacy and modern languages. The school's approach to evaluating its work is improving. The headteacher, working with staff, has put in place a range of appropriate processes including classroom monitoring and attainment review meetings. Staff now have greater involvement in these processes and in identifying priorities for the improvement plan. The school recognises the need to have a more focused and consistent approach to sharing and discussing good practice and in evaluating staff forward plans. It should develop more effective approaches to seeking children's views on a range of issues affecting the school. Children's experiences are improving, but the school needs to maintain a focus on the quality of learning and teaching if ongoing improvements are to be secured.

## **6. Does the school have high expectations of all children?**

The school has a positive and supportive ethos. Relationships are respectful and this helps staff and children to feel valued. Almost all

children are very well behaved. Teachers and children celebrate achievements in a number of effective ways. These include, for example, assemblies and house competitions. The school provides appropriate opportunities for religious observance. It has an appropriate policy for keeping children safe. Almost all children are confident that the school always deals with bullying effectively. Staff are trained in aspects of equality and diversity and promote these well through the daily life of the school. They now need to review how equality and diversity could be built more directly into the curriculum. Staff are developing a shared understanding of the standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels. As a result, staff expectations of children's progress, whilst increasing, are not yet high enough. The small number of complaints are dealt with effectively.

## **7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?**

The school is very well led and has a clear sense of direction. It knows its strengths and areas for development well. It has a well-planned approach to bring about further improvement. The acting headteacher has continued to respond well to the education authority's agenda for improvement which was agreed in May 2010. She has worked very effectively with staff to build on the changes put in place by the headteacher earlier in the session. Blackford Primary School is an improving school and has a clear capacity to improve further.

## **8. What happens next?**

We are confident that, with support from the education authority, the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education. Our District Inspector will maintain contact with the education authority to monitor improvements in learners' achievement.



We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Put in place a clear plan for improving children's skills at all stages and taking forward Curriculum for Excellence.
- Further promote children's skills in discussing, in collaborating and in taking responsibility for their learning.
- Provide a greater level of challenge in planned tasks to meet better the range of learners' needs.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Blackford Primary School.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>

**HM Inspector:** Donald Macleod  
23 August 2011

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

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