

**Ratray Primary School
and Nursery Class
Blairgowrie
Perth and Kinross Council
18 December 2007**

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1. Background

Ratray Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in September 2007 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, representatives of the Friends of Ratray Primary School, the school nurse, the educational psychologist, community representatives and a group of parents¹.

The school serves an area of Blairgowrie on the east bank of the River Ericht, from Middle Drimmie in the north to Millhorn in the south. It also serves the surrounding areas from the north to Whinnyknowe, passing to the east of St Fink and also Cloquhat to the Ericht. At the time of the inspection the roll was 353, including 40 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was below the national average. The school is located within one of the three regeneration areas in Perth and Kinross.

The school had gained a silver Eco award and was working towards achieving Green Flag status.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Children's progress in the nursery class.
- Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Successful and independent learning in the nursery and primary stages.
- The contribution of parents and the community to enhancing nursery children and pupils' learning experiences.
- The effectiveness and commitment of the headteacher to the school and its community.

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.

All parents, staff and pupils were highly satisfied with almost all aspects of the school's work. They agreed that the school was very well led and that it had a very good reputation in the community. Nursery parents were pleased that their children enjoyed nursery and that activities helped their children to progress. Parents were pleased that teachers encouraged them to contribute to their children's learning through home-school diaries and activities such as a 'Parents' Week'. They liked the 'traffic light' scheme which kept them well informed about their children's behaviour. They felt the senior management team dealt promptly with their concerns. Pupils were very proud of their school and thought that they had very good opportunities to make important decisions. They wanted their toilets to improve. Staff enjoyed working in the school and valued support from the headteacher. A few teaching staff felt there were sometimes too many initiatives and new ideas to take on board.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was very good. Nursery children and primary pupils accessed a broad, balanced and varied range of rich learning opportunities. This included stimulating play experiences in the nursery, opportunities for learning through play at P1 and P2, and activities such as the European Day of Languages. Particular strengths included planned development of nursery children's skills, and in primary education about mathematics, health and wellbeing. Pupils received two hours of physical education each week. The quality of teaching was good and, although variable across the school, had many strengths. The teaching of mathematics was very good. Teachers gave clear explanations, organised lessons well, and provided pupils with a broad range of suitable homework. Nursery staff's interactions with children were highly effective. Where practice was most effective, nursery staff and teachers skilfully used questions to check and reinforce nursery children and pupils' understanding. However, this good practice was not yet consistent across the school. At P1 to P3, teachers were developing ways to ensure pupils were actively involved in their learning during lessons. Across the school, staff used information and communications technology (ICT) very well to support and extend pupils' learning.

The quality of learning was very good. Nursery children and pupils were keen to learn. They responded very well to challenges and when given opportunities to cooperate with others. Nursery children and pupils had positive attitudes to learning and worked independently with the minimum of supervision. They were active and taking responsibility for their learning. Children helped enthusiastically at nursery snack times. Primary pupils actively engaged in practical mathematics tasks. Pupils knew what to do to improve aspects of their own learning. Nursery children expressed themselves confidently and creatively when painting, performing and making music. Pupils achieved success in their learning, for example in religious and moral education.

When doing research on Gandhi, they had shared important facts, negotiated and cooperated with others. Throughout the school, the pace of learning enabled nursery children and pupils to make effective progress. Nursery children and pupils' skills in using ICT were very well developed.

The school took well-judged steps to promote pupils' wider achievements. Nursery children were achieving success in their emotional, personal and social development. They were happy, settled and familiar with nursery rules and routines. They cooperated well with one another, shared and took turns. Throughout the school, pupils enjoyed extending their interests through taking part in various experiences including a residential trip to Holland. They achieved success in activities such as sports and music. Pupils from P5 to P7 were making progress in speaking French and German. Pupils benefited from and achieved success in an impressive range of school clubs. For example, pupils at P6 and P7 enthusiastically showed their dancing skills to younger pupils. The school's 'Reach for the Stars' initiative motivated pupils to be ambitious. Pupil council members were aware of their responsibilities as citizens and consulted well with other pupils. Pupils contributed effectively to recycling and nature projects set up by their Eco School Committee. They took part in interesting outdoor education activities at Drimmie Woods. Pupils were learning to be enterprising through raising funds for local and international charities and for the school. They were involved purposefully in the community regeneration enterprise project 'Trout in the Classroom'. Pupils had participated successfully in an outreach citizenship programme in partnership with police and army cadets and had won the Best UK project in 2007.

English language

All children in the nursery were making very good progress in communication and language. They listened carefully to stories and instructions from adults. Almost all used language confidently whilst talking to one another and to adults. Most children made marks and were developing early writing skills. A few could write their own name. Across the primary school, the overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Overall, attainment had improved steadily in recent years. Most achieved or exceeded appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. Pupils' listening skills were less well developed. They did not always listen carefully to their teacher or their peers. As a result, while most pupils talked confidently and were keen to express their views individually, they had difficulty in listening and talking in class and group discussions. Pupils had made very good progress in reading and writing. They enjoyed reading and most read fluently with good understanding. Pupils read regularly for pleasure. At P6 and P7, pupils expressed their opinions confidently on books they had read. Pupils wrote regularly for various purposes across different aspects of their classwork. Their imaginative writing was well structured and very interesting. The overall standard of presentation of pupils' work was of a high quality.

Mathematics

Nursery children's progress in early mathematics was very good. They could count, sort, match and make patterns. Almost all children identified simple shapes. The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good. From P1 to P7, attainment had steadily improved and most pupils attained appropriate national levels. Just over a third of pupils across the school were attaining these levels earlier than

might be expected. Those not attaining expected levels were making very good progress. Across the school, pupils collated and organised information using ICT as appropriate and with confidence. They had a very good understanding of number, money and measurement. At P3, for example, pupils were able to undertake written and oral addition and subtraction calculations with confidence. At P7, pupils understood the links between decimal and vulgar fractions. Pupils had a sound understanding of shape, position and movement. By P7, for example, pupils could identify and measure angles with confidence. Pupils applied problem solving strategies very well and with confidence.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's arrangements for meeting nursery children and pupils' needs were very good. They benefited from stimulating and challenging activities. Nursery and primary staff knew children and pupils very well. Nursery staff used assessment information effectively to provide appropriate activities which met nursery children's needs and extended their interests, for example in mathematics. In most primary classes, staff ensured that learning activities and teaching approaches suitably matched pupils' different needs. They took effective steps, including working with pairs and individuals to meet pupils' individual needs. As a result, almost all, including those with additional support needs were making appropriate progress in mathematics, reading and writing. A few more able pupils at P1 to P3 did not always receive enough challenge in their learning for them to make appropriate progress. The school systematically identified additional support needs at an early stage and ensured support services provided necessary help and staff training. Support staff worked very well to assist pupils who needed additional help. Appropriate individualised educational programmes were in place to support pupils' learning. The school had very good arrangements in place to support children when they moved to P1. The school had a range of activities which were supporting children transferring to Blairgowrie High School.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff took sensitive account of nursery children and pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. They placed a high priority on pupils' care and welfare. The school had well managed procedures for protecting children. Staff set high standards for pupils' behaviour and applied the school's positive behaviour policy consistently. Pupils knew what to do if they were upset or being bullied. Pupils in P6/P7, supported younger pupils well in the playground. The school effectively promoted regular exercise and healthy eating. The school nurse and active school's coordinator were effectively involved in promoting a positive attitude amongst pupils towards their wellbeing.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation and facilities was good. Staff created an attractive and stimulating environment for nursery children and pupils' learning. Pupils looked after their school, cared for their garden area and kept the playground litter free. The school had appropriate security arrangements. The headteacher was in the process of ensuring that an area outside of the school grounds, known as 'the common', used by senior pupils at break-times was risk assessed to assure their safety. Users with mobility difficulties were able to access facilities on the ground floor. Further work needed to be carried out to address the lack of appropriate ventilation in pupils' toilets. There was insufficient storage space.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Climate and relationships in the school were very good. The management team had created a welcoming atmosphere and relationships between staff, parents, nursery children and pupils were very positive. Pupils enjoyed taking on positions of responsibility within the school. Nursery children and pupils were polite and courteous and overall, their behaviour was good. Staff set high standards for pupils' attainment and behaviour and celebrated their achievements on a regular basis. They used praise effectively to motivate pupils. Pupils had regular and varied opportunities for religious observance. They were developing an appropriate awareness of equality issues such as the need to address racism. However, at times when listening to others, pupils did not show enough respect.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established very good partnerships with parents and the community. The headteacher effectively consulted parents on sensitive matters such as health. The school kept parents well informed through a helpful website, newsletters, parents' meetings and progress reports. A high number of parents attended school musical performances and assemblies. Through pupils' personal planning arrangements and home link diaries, staff involved parents appropriately in their children's learning. Parents assisted staff with the popular out-of-school hours activities, including skiing, orienteering and fitness sessions. The newly formed Parent Council was already working well with the school to develop further links with parents. The school had strong links with local businesses and organisations within the community which enhanced pupils' understanding of citizenship and enterprise.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Ratray Primary School delivered a very positive education for nursery children and pupils. The school's ethos was very good. Staff and pupils had successfully created a stimulating and inclusive learning environment. The school provided very good pastoral care and staff were very responsive and alert to pupils' needs. The school's partnership with parents and the community was strong and effective. The teaching of mathematics was very good. Staff's interactions with nursery children were highly effective. Nursery children had high quality learning experiences. Pupils' learning throughout the school was very good. Their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was of a high standard. Their skills in listening were less well developed. Pupils were achieving success in a broad range of areas including ICT, sport and music.

The experienced headteacher provided the school with very good leadership. She was highly committed to the school and its community. She was enthusiastic, provided a clear direction and knew what she wanted for the pupils in her care. She was held in high regard by pupils, parents, staff and others within the community. The depute headteachers provided a good level of support to the headteacher and staff, for example through leading on matters related to the nursery, assessment and ICT. They chaired working groups which were reviewing, developing and implementing appropriately various arrangements linked to delivering improvements in the curriculum. Whilst given the opportunities, teachers did not yet take on sufficient lead roles for improving aspects of the school, through for example charring working groups. There was now a need for the headteacher to review remits and delegate to other staff to encourage more shared leadership across the school. The school's arrangements for using evaluation to

improve pupils' experiences were very good. Initiatives had resulted in significant improvements to pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The headteacher, working closely with one of the depute headteachers in particular, used varied and rigorous approaches to effectively monitor and evaluate all aspects of the work of the school. They involved staff appropriately in reviewing and improving their own practice.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice.

The school had met in full three requirements and three recommendations made at the last Care Commission inspection of 19 October 2006.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- develop pupils' listening skills;
- share effective practice in teaching more consistently across the schools; and
- improve toilet facilities for pupils.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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 the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Moira Cummings
HM Inspector

18 December 2007

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	very good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	very good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	very good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Leadership across the school	good
Self-evaluation	very good

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
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.

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well led. • Children enjoyed school. • The school had a good reputation. • The school was good at consulting parents on decisions affecting their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few wanted the school to deal more effectively with inappropriate behaviour.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly. • Their teacher knew them well and told them how well they were doing with their work. • They got on well with other pupils. • They felt safe and well looked after. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly a fifth of pupils wanted the behaviour of some pupils' to improve.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well led. • Pupil success was celebrated regularly. • Pupils received feedback about their work. • Pupils were enthusiastic about their learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few staff wanted more effective communication.

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 Acting Executive Director of Education and Children's 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, T1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8371. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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