

Carmichael Primary School Biggar South Lanarkshire Council

24 October 2006

Contents

- [1. Background](#)
- [2. Key strengths](#)
- [3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?](#)
- [4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?](#)
- [5. How well are pupils supported?](#)
- [6. How good is the environment for learning?](#)
- [7. Improving the school](#)
- [Appendix 1 Indicators of quality](#)
- [Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses](#)
- [How can you contact us?](#)

1. Background

Carmichael 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 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 the chairperson of the School Board, and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the village of Carmichael and the surrounding area. It formed part of the Lanark Grammar Learning Community. The acting headteacher had been in post for three years. At the time of the inspection the roll was 48. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Polite, courteous and well-behaved pupils.
- Staff who worked very well as a team.
- The overall ethos and the attention given to pupils' care and welfare.
- High quality relationships and partnerships amongst parents, pupils, staff and the community.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

Parents and carers were highly satisfied with almost all aspects of the school's work. They felt the school was experiencing a period of staffing stability and they hoped this would be

maintained. They thought the school had a good reputation in the community and staff made them feel welcome. Parents felt teachers were good at letting them know their child's strengths and weaknesses. A few thought the school could deal with inappropriate behaviour more effectively. Pupils were pleased with most aspects of provision. In particular, they agreed staff explained things clearly and were good at helping them when they had difficulties. All pupils agreed they were involved in decisions on how to make the school better. Staff were very content with all aspects of the school. They felt that the school was well led. All staff felt valued, fully involved in the life of the school and had good opportunities for training. They all enjoyed coming to their work.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Staff provided pupils with a broad and well-balanced curriculum. Recent improvements included changes to improve the quality of provision for pupils in science, technology and writing. Pupils should have more opportunities to develop information communication skills across the curriculum. Visiting specialists were well used to extend and develop pupils' learning in expressive arts. Planned excursions and activities enriched pupils' learning experiences. Provision for pupils learning through play at the early stages was limited. Overall, teachers used a good range of approaches to engage and motivate pupils. Almost all teachers shared the purposes of lessons and most used this effectively to help pupils summarise and evaluate what they had learned. Most questioned pupils effectively to check their understanding. They did not always take full account of more able pupils' prior learning. Teachers gave an appropriate amount of regular homework in English language and mathematics, but it lacked sufficient variety and challenge.

Overall, pupils were well motivated and mainly enthusiastic learners. In most lessons, they listened attentively and worked conscientiously on the tasks they were set. Pupils were developing some independent approaches to learning through visible task boards. In writing tasks, pupils had a good idea of what they needed to do to improve but this could be developed further across the curriculum. When they had the opportunity, they worked together well, in pairs and groups. For example, pupils worked confidently as a team on practical investigations in science. Overall, however, there were too few such opportunities. From P5 to P7, pupils were making good progress in learning French. Most lessons were conducted at a brisk pace. However, in a few cases, pupils were not sufficiently challenged by the pace of learning.

Throughout the school, pupils were making very good progress in developing self-confidence and self-esteem. They had participated in residential experiences and link projects with other small rural schools which had helped them to develop their social skills and self-reliance. Pupils took responsibility for aspects of school life through their participation in the pupil council and the Eco School and health promotion committees. They were learning to be responsible citizens through developing awareness of ecological and health issues. Across the school, pupils were involved in various enterprise activities, such as organising and running a craft fair, an art exhibition and presenting curriculum topics to parents. Pupils were very aware of the needs of others and regularly raised significant sums of money for charities. Pupils were developing awareness of global poverty through recently embarking on a twinning project with a school in Ethiopia. Many pupils enhanced their skills in art and design, ICT and science skills through active participation in outwith school hours clubs.

English language

The quality of pupils' attainment in English Language was very good. The school had maintained high levels of attainment in recent years. Almost all pupils were achieving

appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Pupils at P1 to P3 were making very good progress in the development of their early literacy skills. Pupils with additional support needs were making very good progress in their coursework. Almost all pupils listened carefully and followed instructions successfully. They listened less well in group discussions. At P7, pupils talked confidently about their experiences and feelings. They expressed opinions about texts they had read. Many pupils read widely for pleasure and all pupils made some use of the school library. However, they had limited knowledge of a range of authors or styles of writing. At all stages, pupils wrote well for a broad range of purposes and audiences. They demonstrated a good level of knowledge about language. They were using learning targets to help improve their writing. Standards of presentation were too variable.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. Standards of attainment had been consistently high for some years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. Significant numbers, at the early stages, were achieving these levels earlier than might be expected. Most pupils were making very good progress in their coursework which was appropriately challenging. However, a few higher-attaining pupils needed greater pace and challenge to develop their mathematical skills. In some classes, pupils had used computers to organise and display information. Pupils were confident in their approaches to written and mental mathematics. At P7, pupils could competently use fractions, decimals and percentages. Across the school, pupils could identify a good range of two- and three-dimensional shapes and discuss their properties appropriate to their stage. They could use the properties of angles to solve simple mathematical problems. At all stages, pupils were developing good approaches to solving problems set in a variety of contexts. They could identify and apply a range of strategies to help them reach a solution.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The quality of pastoral care was very good. All teachers and support staff were caring and approachable, and showed commitment to ensuring pupils' emotional and physical well-being. All staff knew pupils very well and had very good working relationships with them. They followed clear procedures for dealing with child protection matters and arrangements had been made to ensure all staff were appropriately trained. The school actively promoted healthy lifestyles and pupils had a sound understanding of personal safety and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Pupils knew who to contact if they had any concerns and most felt that the school dealt effectively with any incidents of bullying.

Staff provided good support for meeting the needs of most pupils with differing levels of attainment. Teachers and support staff worked well together to provide effective support for individuals and groups of pupils in their class work. Planned activities were well judged to ensure that most pupils made good progress. However, higher attaining pupils were insufficiently challenged by some tasks. The learning needs of pupils requiring additional support were very well identified and supported. Staff worked closely with the visiting teacher from the network support team who provided a good level of support. They prepared individual educational programmes (IEPs) which assisted pupils in making good progress in their learning. Parents were involved in the review of IEPs. There were good arrangements in place to support the transition of children from nursery to P1 and from P7 to S1.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
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Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was adequate. Staff had made good use of the available space to create a bright and stimulating learning environment. Throughout the school there were interesting displays of pupils' work. An additional classroom was used effectively for a range of purposes which enhanced learning and teaching. There was limited space for storage and the school did not have a gymnasium. However, good use was made of the adjacent community hall for physical education. Access for disabled users was limited due to stairs at the entrance to the classroom located in the playground. Security arrangements were appropriate although the location of the school office made it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of the secure entry system. The fire alarm was operated manually.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Staff, pupils and parents had a strong sense of identity and pride in their school. Staff had created a warm and welcoming environment and relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Teachers, support staff and catering staff worked very well together as a team. Throughout the school, pupils were courteous and well behaved. Staff had set high expectations for attendance and behaviour but overall, expectations of pupils and what they were capable of achieving could be higher. School assemblies provided regular opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' efforts and successes. Staff promoted equality and fairness in their dealings with pupils. While pupils had some understanding of religious diversity, the school had not yet sufficiently developed its approaches to promoting race equality and to helping pupils recognise and tackle discrimination.
Partnership with parents and the community	The school's partnership with parents and the local community was very good. The school board was very supportive of the work of the school. The school communicated regularly with parents through letters and newsletters. Parents provided valuable support at weekly paired reading sessions and on trips. The school had set up productive links with the community to support aspects of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Staff produced interim and end-of-year reports for parents and held two formal meetings with parents each session to discuss their children's progress. The school had recently gathered pupils' views on approaches to enterprise and health education. They consulted parents appropriately on sensitive health issues including sexual health. Staff organised very helpful open mornings on aspects of the curriculum. School concerts were well attended by the local community. Staff had developed good links with schools of a similar size and their associated secondary school.

7. Improving the school

[Appendix 1](#) provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

Overall, Carmichael Primary School provided a good quality education for its pupils. It provided a very caring and supportive environment for pupils and staff. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was high. Relationships between staff and pupils were

very good and teachers taught well. The quality of support for pupils with additional support needs was good. However, staff did not always provide sufficiently challenging activities to meet the needs of higher attaining pupils, particularly in reading, listening and talking. Pupils were motivated and well behaved. They did not have frequent enough opportunities to learn through working collaboratively.

The acting headteacher provided good leadership. She had organised and revised programmes of study across the curriculum, including writing and mathematics in order to raise attainment. She had successfully involved staff in working together to improve further the work of the school. Staff working groups had helped improve approaches to teaching religious and moral education and science. The acting headteacher had begun to monitor learning and teaching, but progress had been limited due to staff absence. The headteacher provided helpful feedback on most teachers' plans. Staff had begun to evaluate their own teaching. They had a good understanding of the strengths and development needs of pupils in their classes but did not have a clear enough view of pupils' progress across the school. The school had the clear capacity to ensure continuing improvement. Working together, the headteacher and staff were well placed to further improve the work of the school.

Main points for action

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

- ensure tasks are sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of all pupils; and
- continue to develop systematic approaches to monitoring and evaluating learning and teaching and tracking pupils' 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.

Elizabeth Cole
HM Inspector

24 October 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	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	very good
Meeting pupils' needs	good
How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
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	good
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 showed care and concern for their children. The school had a good reputation in the community and staff made them feel welcome. They got helpful information about their children's progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few parents felt the school did not deal effectively with inappropriate behaviour.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers explained things clearly and checked their homework. Pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The behaviour of some pupils could be better.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one teacher knew them well. 	
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff liked working in the school and thought it was well led. • Pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • Their training time was used well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the acting headteacher and school staff, the Executive Director (Education Resources), 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, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. 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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1. Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.
