

# Coulter Primary School, Biggar South Lanarkshire Council

7 October 2008

## 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' learning needs met?](#)
6. [How good is the environment for learning?](#)
7. [Leading and improving the school](#)
- [Appendix 1 Indicators of quality](#)
- [Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses](#)
- [Appendix 3 Good Practice](#)
- [How can you contact us?](#)

## 1. Background

Coulter Primary School was inspected in May 2008 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 innovation, 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 the chairperson of the Parent Council and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

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 Coulter and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 19. The school forms part of the Biggar learning community. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. The headteacher was headteacher of both Coulter Primary School and Lamington Primary School, another small school situated three miles away.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' knowledge about the environment and healthy lifestyles.
- Very good relationships between staff and pupils, and the care taken by all staff to promote pupils' welfare.
- Pupils' very good behaviour and their enthusiasm for learning.
- Strong, productive partnership with parents, local schools and the wider local

community.

- The impact of self-evaluation on improving the school.
- Leadership at all levels.

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

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about the school. Parents felt welcome in the school and thought that teachers set high standards for their child's learning. Pupils enjoyed school and felt safe there. They liked the way teachers praised them for doing well and helped to keep them healthy. Staff were very positive about working in the school. They commented on the high level of teamwork, the mutual respect between adults and pupils and the school's very positive ethos. All staff felt that the school was well led.

### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

#### **Learners' experiences**

The school provided pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. Personal and social development permeated the curriculum very well. Staff had developed and successfully implemented detailed programmes to support health education. They worked creatively and successfully to ensure that pupils experienced two hours of physical education each week. Commendably, by P7, all pupils learned to swim. Their skills in information and communications technology (ICT) were developing well, but were not used regularly enough to support their learning in other curricular areas. At P4 to P7, pupils needed further opportunities to develop their skills in English language and mathematics across the curriculum. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good. Most teachers shared the purpose of lessons with pupils and provided well-planned opportunities for pupils to work together and learn from each other. The quality of discussion between pupils and teachers was often of a very high standard. This good practice was not evident in all lessons. Pupils needed more opportunities to become involved in setting some of their own learning targets and reviewing their learning at the end of lessons.

The quality of learners' experiences was good. Almost all pupils were eager, enthusiastic learners. They responded positively to many examples of very good, inspiring teaching. Many were beginning to take responsibility for aspects of their learning and were growing in independence. Pupils at P1 to P3 needed more opportunities to make choices in their play.

#### **Improvements in performance**

In recent years, the school had improved its performance in several key areas. Overall, this amounted to a very good performance.

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Pupils at P1 and P2 were building effectively on their prior learning. Across the school, most were attaining appropriate national levels in reading and writing. Following a school focus on raising pupils' attainment, pupils' performance in reading had improved in recent years. Pupils with additional support needs were well supported in class and were making very good progress. At all stages, pupils listened attentively and responded enthusiastically in discussions. Several were skilled in giving oral presentations in class and at assemblies. A few pupils needed to develop their group discussion skills further. Pupils read fluently for a variety of purposes. The school had taken a number of successful steps to develop pupils' interest in reading for pleasure. At P4 to P7, pupils wrote sensitive poetry about their pets. Most pupils were progressing steadily in developing and editing their own writing. They

would benefit from further opportunities to write at length and for a wider variety of purposes. At all stages, pupils showed a good understanding of punctuation and grammar and took pride in presenting their written work.

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good. It had improved in recent years. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in key aspects of mathematics. Staff at the early primary stages built effectively on children's prior learning. The pace of pupils' learning in mathematics as they progressed through the primary stages was not yet fast enough for all pupils. By P7, pupils were able to interpret a broad range of graphs and charts. They needed more opportunities use ICT to carry out surveys and display information. Throughout the school, pupils carried out mental and written calculations accurately. Most knew their multiplication tables well and could apply this knowledge in more complex calculations. At P5 to P7, pupils confidently carried out calculations involving decimals and fractions. At P4, pupils could describe the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes and, by P6, they had a sound understanding of angles. Most pupils could identify a range of strategies to solve mathematical problems. They had difficulty in applying their knowledge to practical situations.

Pupils were making very good progress across other areas of the curriculum. They were developing their confidence in many aspects of physical education. At P4 to P7, pupils developed these skills further by participating in challenging outdoor activities during residential experiences at outdoor centres. Several senior pupils were learning to play brass instruments and showcased their talents at school and authority events. Pupils at all stages learned important citizenship skills. These included welcoming members of the community into the school and working with them in creating an attractive garden. Pupils were developing skills in enterprise in education. Overall, however, pupils had insufficient understanding about the world of work.

The school took a number of effective steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Pupils eagerly accepted the many opportunities offered to develop their sense of responsibility. They acted as members of the pupil council and eco committee, as well as buddies to younger pupils. Pupils were very knowledgeable about the need for a healthy diet and lifestyle. They were proud of their gold award as a Health Promoting School. Pupils' involvement in the school's clubs and out-of-hours activities, for example the chess club, helped them to develop their confidence within a supportive social setting. Pupils had developed a deep knowledge about issues concerning protection of the environment. The school had achieved a silver Eco-Schools Scotland award for its work in this area.

The school had made very good progress in overtaking the priorities in its improvement plan. Many of these had made a positive difference to the learning environment for pupils. Partnerships with parents and the local community had improved significantly. Parents were now more fully involved in many aspects of their children's learning. The introduction of a more active approach to learning was improving pupils' enthusiasm for learning and their attainment in reading and writing. The headteacher and principal teacher led staff in reflecting on ways to improve pupils' experiences further, and had made an accurate assessment of the school's strengths and development priorities. This represented a very good improvement in performance.

## **5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?**

The school's approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were good overall. Teachers offered a high level of focused support to pupils experiencing difficulties in their learning. Tasks and activities in a few lessons were not always well enough matched to the learning needs of all pupils. At times, lessons lacked appropriate challenge for higher-achieving

pupils. The school's close links with parents and a range of partner agencies helped ensure effective learning experiences for pupils with additional support needs. The school had drawn up individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for identified pupils. These were very helpful in assisting staff to ensure that pupils made appropriate progress from prior levels of achievement. Support staff made very effective contributions to individual pupils' learning. As a result of the school's approaches, those experiencing difficulties were progressing well. Pupils transferring from pre-school into P1 and those from P7 to Biggar High School were very well supported.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	The school's arrangements for pupils' care and welfare were very good. Staff knew pupils well. They worked effectively together to create a climate of mutual trust, respect and confidence. They were very clear about their responsibilities in relation to child protection. Pupils felt safe and happy in school. They had access to a number of ways for raising any concerns they might have about aspects of the school and were confident that staff would deal appropriately with these. Pupils showed a high level of support for each other during play and social activities. The school promoted healthy eating very effectively by providing healthy lunches and a wide range of related learning opportunities. Catering and school staff interacted very positively with pupils to encourage them to eat healthily and develop an active lifestyle.
Management and use of resources and space for learning	The quality of accommodation was very good. Classrooms and open areas were bright, spacious and well furnished. Staff used the adjacent, well-appointed village hall to enhance children's learning in physical education. School staff, with the help of parents, had used available space very effectively to create additional teaching space, a play area and a well-resourced library. Resources were very well organised to enable ready access by pupils when appropriate. Parts of the playground had been successfully developed by pupils, staff and parents working in partnership to create a 'secret garden'. The gardens were well used to enhance pupils' learning about the environment. The building had appropriate arrangements for security. There was limited access for people with mobility disabilities.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	The headteacher and staff had created a very welcoming, caring and supportive environment for pupils, staff, parents and visitors. Staff and pupils identified strongly with the school and were proud to be associated with it. Pupils were very well behaved and cooperative with teachers and with each other. Teachers promoted achievement through the regular use of praise and class and school reward systems. They had high expectations of pupils' attendance, behaviour and attainment in most areas. Their expectations of attainment in writing now needed to improve. The school's strong partnership with the local church helped the school offer good opportunities to take part in religious observance. The headteacher and staff effectively promoted mutual respect and fairness in their interactions with pupils. Through assemblies and class lessons, pupils learned how to recognise and address racism.

<p>The school's success in involving parents, carers and families</p>	<p>The school had developed many successful ways of involving parents and the wider community in its work. Parents and carers were made very welcome. Parents and friends of the school worked alongside teachers in a range of activities. These included participating in play sessions at P1 and P2, offering high quality experiences in yoga to all pupils and developing the school grounds. Parents had appropriate opportunities to view sensitive materials for health education. The very supportive Parent Council acted closely and successfully with school staff to improve experiences for pupils. The school was developing arrangements to consult parents more fully about possible improvements to its work. Parents were very satisfied with the work of the school. In addition to informal visits to the school, parents received regular reports and met twice a year formally with staff to discuss their children's progress. Parents knew how to raise any concerns and were confident these would be dealt with appropriately.</p>
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## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Coulter Primary School provided its pupils with a high quality education within a caring and supportive environment. Parents, staff and pupils were actively involved in the life of the school and its community and contributed towards its very positive ethos. Attainment was good and improving. Staff were committed to the school. Relationships and teamwork were very positive.

The headteacher provided excellent leadership. She demonstrated outstanding skill in developing the leadership and teaching skills of staff, and improving learning experiences for pupils. She had set clear, appropriate priorities for improving all aspects of pupils' experiences and greatly improved the quality of partnerships throughout the school and community. Her practical, well-considered approach to change had significantly developed staff teamwork and raised morale. The principal teacher demonstrated very good leadership in taking forward developments in health promotion across both Coulter Primary School and its partner school. Both she and the headteacher modelled very good teaching. Support staff were effectively developing links with their partner school, including taking an active part in supporting games lessons. Pupils responded enthusiastically to many opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The headteacher had introduced a range of rigorous self-evaluation procedures which had already resulted in significant improvement. She monitored teachers' plans, scrutinised attainment data, sampled pupils' work and visited classes, encouraging teachers to reflect carefully on their own practice and consider how they could continue to improve. As a result of the strong leadership of the headteacher and principal teacher, the positive staff teamwork and the enthusiastic support of parents and the local community, the school was now very well placed to continue to improve its work.

### **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:

- continue to develop the curriculum, and provide consistently high quality learning and teaching in order to better meet the learning needs of all pupils.

### **What happens next?**

As a result of the improving performance, the strong approaches to 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.

Anne McGachey  
HM Inspector

7 October 2008

## 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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
The curriculum	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Learners' experiences	good
Improvements in performance	very good
<b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b>	
Meeting learning needs	good
<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	very good
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	very good
<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Developing people and partnerships	excellent
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	excellent
Improvement through self-evaluation	excellent

**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
satisfactory	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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They felt welcome in the school.</li><li>• The school kept them well informed about their child's progress.</li><li>• Staff showed concern for pupils' care and welfare.</li><li>• The school had a good reputation in the local community.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There were no significant issues.</li></ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers helped them with their work and expected them to work hard.</li><li>• Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they had difficulty.</li><li>• The school helped them keep safe and healthy.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There were no significant issues.</li></ul>
<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff were very positive about all aspects of the life and work of the school.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There were no significant issues.</li></ul>

## Appendix 3 Good practice

In the course of the inspection, the following aspects of innovative and effective practice were evaluated as being worthy of wider dissemination.

### Shared Headship

The headteacher post is shared between two small rural schools, situated about three miles apart. The headteacher developed an effective working relationship between both schools in the following ways.

- The principal teachers had successfully led developments across both schools, in developing areas such as formative assessment and health promotion. Benefits included opportunities to share practice, teambuilding, shared vision, effective use of resources and developing leadership capacity. This had led to improvements in learning and teaching in both schools.

□ Support staff had worked to harmonise administrative arrangements in each school. This had improved learning outcomes for pupils and improved the smooth running of both schools.

□ Staff set up a system of e-mail buddies between the older children in each school. This further developed independent learning and increased social interaction amongst peers. This was particularly beneficial in schools where there may be only one child at a stage.

□ Social interaction amongst peers had also been developed through Team Sports (P4 to P7) and Minikickers (P1 to P3) and Health Promotion workshops.

A joint Art Gallery project with pupils and parents of both schools, and the development of play activities across P1 to P3, enhanced the partnership between schools. Parents of P1 to P3 pupils at Lamington visited Coulter Primary Open Day to see their children working with P1 to P3 Coulter children. Parent Councils were developing a positive partnership and were considering joint projects to support both schools. The strong links between the two schools led naturally this year to a very successful joint residential experience for pupils at P4 and P5 at an outdoor centre. Pupils at P7 in both schools came together for a full and effective programme of transition into Biggar High School. This allowed the small numbers of pupils at this stage in each school to gain valuable social and learning experiences with their future classmates. They took part in a joint quiz team and a week's residential outdoor session. Through this partnership, pupils at P7 in both schools significantly developed their confidence and enthusiasm regarding transition to secondary school.

### Health Promotion

The school had developed its approaches to health promotion over the last year. This initiative was aimed at addressing rural deprivation, developing physical well-being and encouraging socialising and community involvement in the life of school.

The health promotion initiative, led by the principal teacher, allowed pupils to take responsibility for improving the school environment. Examples included upgrading the library and using the interactive library system to promote independence. Pupils organised their playground equipment, led play activities and formulated rotas and rules. The school's partnership with the local community had been significantly strengthened through monthly activities such as an art exhibition, a car wash and the launch of school library. The quality of pupils' diet had improved through a range of initiatives run in partnership with the school's catering manager. Pupils were given the opportunity to sample a wide range of

sports, including badminton, golf, basketball and gardening. This encouraged them to join local clubs and take a more active role in the community. Popular inter-school clubs held outwith school hours were led by the active schools coordinator.

Children were now more aware of their own capabilities and more willing to rise to challenges. The school is now at the heart of the local community, and supportive, positive relationships continue to be developed to the benefit of all involved.

## **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 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 <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/>.

### **HMIE Feedback and Complaints Procedure**

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, HMCI, at HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail [HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk). A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at <http://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 (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: [ask@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: <http://www.spsso.org.uk/>.

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## **Footnotes**

1. Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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