



**Strathmore Primary School
and Nursery Class
Forfar
Angus Council
5 May 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents² and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term ‘school’ is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² 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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1. The school

Strathmore Primary School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class. It serves an area in the south of Forfar. The roll was 370, including 73 in the nursery when the inspection was carried out in February 2009. The school was formed in August 2007, amalgamating three local schools. It moved into its new building in January 2008. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Recent improvements in active learning approaches and children's progress from nursery to P2.
- The high quality of support offered to children experiencing difficulties with their learning.
- Strong support for children as they transfer from pre-school settings into P1, and from P7 to Forfar Academy.
- The commitment of the staff team to school improvement.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In the nursery class, children are making satisfactory progress in all aspects of their learning. They are happy and settled at nursery and are confident in their play. Children are learning to recognise their name in print. They would benefit from increased opportunities to develop early writing skills. Most talk confidently to adults and a few can share ideas with others. During their play, they can count, sort and match. They need more practice in playing with a range of shapes. Children are growing in confidence in movement activities, many of which take place out of doors. Staff are aware of the need to include children more in planning nursery activities. In the primary classes, children at P1 and P2 make a good start to their learning, building on their nursery experiences. They have good opportunities to learn actively through play and are developing an understanding of what they do well. Those children who attend the wide range of clubs and activities offered are developing confidence, life-long skills and a broad range of interests. For example, a small number of children are learning to play string or brass instruments. Children who take part in

the choir speak positively about the pleasure this brings them. At all stages, children have some knowledge about the importance of eating healthily and taking regular exercise. Most children are acquiring a very good understanding of Scots language and culture. Children at P6 and P7 enjoy learning French or German and can introduce themselves confidently. Overall, however, many are capable of achieving higher standards. Children's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has recently improved but is still too low. At P2, a number of children achieve national levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics earlier than might normally be expected. The school has begun to build on this good start, and children's attainment from P3 to P7 is showing signs of improvement. Across the school, children's progress in English language has some important weaknesses. Most children share their views confidently, although a few do not listen well. Several find it difficult to take turns in group discussions. The school's recent focus on reading is beginning to help children become confident and successful readers. Children in a few classes do not present their written work well enough. The school recognises the need to improve children's skills in writing. In mathematics, children are making progress in classwork. A number of children at most stages could learn at a faster pace. At all stages, children count and measure accurately and several can discuss how they reach their answers. Too few children are confident when working with fractions and decimals. Children would benefit from more practice in solving problems. This would help them use their mathematical skills better in everyday situations.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Children in the nursery experience a wide range of play activities which help them develop effectively their skills in literacy and numeracy. Staff use the outdoor area very well to enhance the quality of children's learning experiences. They now need to provide more activities designed to build on children's natural curiosity. This would help develop children's investigative skills and offer them further challenge. In the primary classes, staff provide children with a broad curriculum which enables them to develop a range of knowledge and

skills. Teachers are beginning to develop aspects of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. For example, children's study of topics based on the theme of *Homecoming* has enabled them to see and build on connections between different areas of learning. Across the school, children are learning about what is needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The school's approaches to supporting children's personal and social development need more consistency and rigour. A number of children need more guidance in developing a responsible approach to caring for others and contributing to their environment. The school has yet to ensure that all children receive two hours of quality physical education each week. Children need more opportunities to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy across a range of curricular areas.

In the nursery, staff know children well and make helpful observations of their learning. A number of children in the nursery have additional support needs. Overall, staff meet the needs of these children well. Senior staff do not offer enough support to nursery staff in their planning to meet the learning needs of all children. In the primary classes, children's learning needs are not well enough met. Tasks set by teachers sometimes lack challenge. At P3 to P7, a majority of children could learn at a faster pace. The additional support for learning team organises and delivers a very high level of support to children who are experiencing difficulties with their learning. Working together, teachers, specialists and support staff ensure that these children are making very good progress in their learning. Children for whom English is not their first language are very well supported and included. The school's arrangements to monitor the progress of vulnerable groups of children now need to be strengthened. Those children with behavioural difficulties need a greater measure of support. Occasionally, the behaviour of a few children interrupts the flow of learning. Teachers are beginning to involve children more in discussions about learning. Whilst a number of lessons are well paced and exciting, there are considerable inconsistencies in the quality of children's learning across the school. In a number of lessons, staff do not challenge children enough.

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

The school has close, supportive links with psychological services, therapists, social workers and local businesses. These help improve the quality of children's experiences. Health professionals, the active schools coordinator and others have helped school staff support children's learning in health education. The Parent Council offers clear support to the school and is now ready to take on a wider range of responsibilities. The school keeps parents well informed about its work through helpful progress reports, parent-teacher meetings, regular newsletters, a range of information events and the school website. The school is good at sorting out complaints from parents, children and other members of the community. The school works very closely with pre-school establishments to help children make a confident move into P1. Children moving from P7 to Forfar Academy receive a very high level of support from staff from both schools.

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

Staff are very committed to the school and most are enthusiastic about introducing new ideas and approaches. Teachers readily engage in professional development and give generously of their time to run clubs and events to improve children's experience. Staff and children work together creatively to raise funds for local and national charities. A small proportion of children benefit from their involvement in school committees and are beginning to develop effective presentation skills. Too many children are unaware of the activities of the pupil council. More children would benefit from increased opportunities to exercise responsibility, both in their learning and more widely across the school. Staff are not yet evaluating effectively approaches to learning and teaching in their own classroom practice. The headteacher needs to continue to develop their skills in this area and provide more targeted advice, based on her observation of classroom practice.

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

Across the school, most children are friendly and polite to staff and one another. School staff are very committed to supporting the care and wellbeing of children and are vigilant in carrying out their responsibilities concerning child protection. Despite the strong efforts of a number of individual teachers, there remains considerable scope for children's attainment and behaviour across the school to improve. The headteacher and staff work hard to support those children whose attendance is not high enough. Children's achievements, including those outwith school, are celebrated at assemblies and in displays. Staff make good use of the very good accommodation and facilities to support children's learning. Members of local faith groups contribute to assemblies and support the school's religious observance. Children learn about a range of faiths and the school has begun to help children recognise and celebrate the different components of Scottish society.

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

The headteacher was appointed to the new school in August 2007. Over that time, she has skilfully supported the school through its amalgamation and its move to a new building. She has successfully supported staff teamwork and is beginning to enable staff to improve children's learning. The headteacher now needs to monitor children's progress more rigorously to secure further improvement. The depute headteacher supports a few aspects of children's learning. She now needs to develop her knowledge and skills further to help lead improvement in children's learning. Both principal teachers model very good teaching and carry out demanding remits effectively. Staff are enthusiastic and fully committed to improving the school. Many are beginning to take on leadership roles. The education authority offers sound support and guidance to the headteacher and staff. As a result of this teamwork, the school is being well supported to improve its work further.

8. What happens next?

We will carry out a follow-through inspection visit within one year of publication of this report and will report to parents on the extent to which the school has improved. Following that visit, we may continue to check the improvements the school has made. We may also carry out a second follow-through inspection within two years of the original inspection report. If a second follow-through inspection visit is necessary then it will result in another report to parents on the extent of improvement that the school has made.

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

- Staff should continue to raise attainment in English language and mathematics across the primary classes by ensuring that learning activities are set at the right level for all children.
- The school should continue to improve its approaches to promoting positive behaviour.
- Senior staff should make better use of information about children's progress to improve the quality of children's learning.
- The school should improve leadership at all levels, support the nursery better and provide more opportunities for children to exercise responsibility.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were two requirements which had been addressed. In addition, two recommendations were made, and both had been addressed.

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 Strathmore Primary School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

Improvements in performance	weak
Learners' experiences	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory

Nursery class

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Children's experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school and nursery class.

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

HM Inspector: Anne McGachey
5 May 2009

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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