



**Strachan School  
Aberdeenshire Council  
24 February 2009**

We published a report on Strachan School in January 2007. That report set out key strengths of the school and main points for action. We carried out an interim follow-through inspection in October 2007 and published a report on that visit in January 2008.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in November 2008. It tells you about improvements since the original inspection in the quality of education which the school provides. It also comments on how the school is getting on with the main points for action. First we focus on changes in the core work of the school. We explain how the school has got better at helping children to learn and benefit from being at the school. Next we look at the key processes which enable this to happen, including the involvement of parents<sup>1</sup>. Our report also describes developments in the 'ethos' of the school, by which we mean how well children are cared for and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally we comment on improvements in leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

A copy of this report has been placed on the HMIE website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Where applicable, you will also find descriptions of good practice in the school.

---

<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.

## **Contents**

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Example of good practice
4. How well do children learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?
6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

### **1. The school**

The school serves the village of Strachan, near Banchory, and the surrounding rural area.

Since the original inspection, staff changes have taken place, including the appointment of a new part-time teacher and new non-teaching staff.

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

- Improved attainment in English language and mathematics.
- Staff's higher expectations of children.
- Children's greater involvement in learning.
- Cooperation between children in discussing and evaluating aspects of their work.
- More effective communication with parents.
- Staff's commitment to self-evaluation and improving the school.

## **3. Example of good practice**

- The use of 'talking partners'.

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

The quality of children's learning experiences has improved. The atmosphere in both classes is positive. Almost all children work steadily at a good pace. Children are responsive and many contribute confidently and enthusiastically during lessons. Teachers have been encouraging them effectively to become more independent and take greater responsibility for their own learning. Children are now well used to working with a 'talking partner' to discuss and assess different aspects of their work. Their attainment in English language and mathematics has improved. Staff have continued to develop children's

responsibilities and achievements outwith the classroom, particularly in P4 to P7. The pupil council is more effective now, and children at P6/P7 have trained to be young leaders in the playground.

Staff have been improving the curriculum. In particular, they are continuing to develop writing and key aspects of mathematics. Children have more opportunities now to apply their skills in information and communications technology. Teachers are broadening the well-established programme for personal and social development. They recognise that they still need to improve some aspects of the curriculum, such as science. They are making a good start to implementing the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff are expecting more of children and supporting them well in their learning. They could still challenge some high-achieving children more consistently. Teachers have been improving their use of assessment, but should now set children clearer targets for improving their work.

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

The school is continuing to strengthen communication with parents and to involve them more in their children's learning. It has provided additional workshops on *Curriculum for Excellence* and children's transition from the P1-P3 to the P4-P7 class. Parents have been well consulted on a range of issues, including health education and the school's aims and values. The new Parent Council is supporting the school very well. The school has maintained close links with other small schools in the area. These links benefit children's personal and social development through their involvement in joint activities and social events. Staff have also benefited by sharing ideas and expertise with colleagues in the other schools.

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

The school has greatly improved its approaches to quality assurance. Staff are very committed to improving the school. They are continually reflecting on the quality of their work and making improvements. All of the class teachers observe one another's lessons and give each other helpful feedback. Each of them has responsibility for gathering evidence to be used in school self-evaluation. The headteacher checks samples of children's work and works closely with her colleagues to monitor children's progress. Children have very good opportunities to give their views about the school, including how their learning might be improved.

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

Staff are expecting much more of children in terms of their attainment and involvement in learning. Children are positive about the school and standards of behaviour are high. They are well looked after by staff and feel safe at school. All staff have now been suitably briefed on child protection and an annual programme of training has been established. Staff have evaluated and improved the way they teach children about fairness and equality, including racial discrimination.

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

The headteacher was not long in post at the time of the original inspection. Since then, she has led the school effectively through a period of steady improvement. She relates positively to the children. Staff feel well guided by her and are much clearer now about the way forward for the school. They work very well as a team, sharing responsibilities, and have significantly improved the quality of children's learning and attainment.

## **9. What happens next?**

There is clear evidence of continued improvement in the school since the first follow-through visit in October 2007. The school now performs well overall and is well placed to go on improving. The quality of improvements in children's performance, of learners' experiences, and of meeting learning needs, is now satisfactory or better. We will make no further visits in connection with the original inspection report of January 2007.

**HM Inspector:** Tom Straiton  
24 February 2009

To find out more about inspections or get an electronic copy of this report go to [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Please contact the Business Management and Communications Team (BMCT) if you wish to enquire about our arrangements for translated or other appropriate versions.

If you wish to comment about any of our inspections, contact us at [HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEenquiries@hmie.gsi.gov.uk) or alternatively you should write in the first instance to BMCT, HM Inspectorate of Education, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Our complaints procedure is available from our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk) or alternatively you can write to our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

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 at [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk).

Crown Copyright 2009  
HM Inspectorate of Education