

# CAN A DEDICATED SCOTS LANGUAGE PROGRAMME OF STUDY BENEFIT A PUPIL WHOSE HOME LANGUAGE IS SCOTS?



A report on the Scots Language at  
Coulter Primary School  
South Lanarkshire  
Autumn 2004

## Background

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### **Can a dedicated Scots Language programme of study benefit a pupil whose home language is Scots?**

South Lanarkshire Education, in the first project of its kind by any local authority in Scotland, ran a dedicated Scots Language monitoring project from August to December 2004.

Janey Mauchline, the authority's 5 - 18 Language Advisor, identified a need for such a project at Coulter Primary School in response to a request made by head teacher, Caroline Cruikshank. The school had expressed concern about a pupil (here for the purposes of this report called Kevin, not his real name) in that a number of factors may be inhibiting his development as a reader.

One of these was disruption in the boy's home life over which the school and the authority could have little influence; another centred on the fact he is a Scots speaker and it had been suggested that as such, he may not be engaging to his full potential in class where the main spoken and written language is English.

Few local authorities would be able or prepared to recognise this boy's spoken language as Scots. The tendency has been to define the language of Scots speakers as bad or lazy English, slang or impertinence. South Lanarkshire however in this case took a different view. Janey Mauchline is one of the few Advisors who has been developing Scots through an established programme of in-service and author visits in her authority and has many years expertise in delivering Scots Language to schools. Caroline Cruikshank similarly has experience of the issues surrounding the use of Scots in the classroom. In addition Coulter PS had had in Summer Term 04 a visit from the Scots Language project, Itchy Coe, when the head teacher had noted the enthusiasm of her pupils, in particular of Kevin, to do more work in Scots.

South Lanarkshire asked Matthew Fitt, Schools Officer for Itchy Coe, to work with the P7s of Coulter PS. His remit was to explore ways of fostering an enthusiasm in Kevin for Reading and to monitor any improvement in his Writing through a dedicated Scots Language programme of study. Matthew's time was paid for by

South Lanarkshire and he visited the school for an hour a week from August until Christmas 2004.

(Some readers of this report may bridle at the term 'Scots Language'. Others may be concerned that this kind of speech is an inappropriate medium for education. Others still may recognise Scots as an element of KAL that they have already incorporated into their teaching practice.

English Language 5 – 14 stated in 1991 that the 'language children bring to school should be fostered and encouraged'. Although many schools have not acted on this, a number of teachers have seen these guidelines as an opportunity to take forward the Scots Language in the classroom.

Scots is a Germanic language spoken by approximately 1.6 million people in the urban and rural lowlands of Scotland. It is recognised by the Scottish Executive, the UK Government and the European Union. Robert Burns, the celebration of whose life each January is a global event, wrote primarily in Scots.)

To read Learning & Teaching Scotland's Special Focus on Scots, go to:

[www.ltscotland.org.uk/5-14](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5-14)

## **The Report**

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When I first began working with the group of six P7s at Coulter Primary, Kevin was inattentive, reluctant to answer and had little enthusiasm for reading and writing. The first session however revealed that his Scots vocabulary and his Scots-speaking skills were better than any of the other pupils.

At the beginning of the second session, the group failed to turn in homework of an adequate quality. I reset the homework task which was to supply one Scots adjective paired up with one Scots noun. The class returned this homework the following week. All but Kevin did what was asked – one adjective, one noun. Kevin supplied more than ten adjectives to go with his one noun. Kevin's responses to the homework tasks continued to impress. His written homework has been

consistently as substantial and in some case more substantial than that of the rest of the group.

Within the group, Kevin has answered well, becoming relaxed enough to give an answer even when wrong. At one point, he told me that he has been told off in a different school for speaking Scots in class. He said that he did not realise the true meaning of the town in which he used to live, Coalburn. He said he thought the 'burn' element of the word meant 'burning', not a stream. He has gone from calling Scots 'slang' to calling it 'Scots'. He mentioned that his father uses a lot of Scots and often quotes words his father uses.

Most significantly, during the first six sessions with this group, Kevin remarked that he had been looking through his German dictionary at home (the class is studying German) and he noticed that a number of the German words were just like Scots. That an eleven year old boy who has been identified as a poor reader was able without any prompting to compare two languages in this way was very striking.

Kevin in this Scots Language group is the one of the fastest pupils to find the right answer to questions. He is one of the keenest to do more work in Scots and he is always one of the first to volunteer to read. He was absent one week and during the session without him the pupils struggled to come up with new Scots words to add to the exercise.

His teacher, Miss Armstrong, has commented that there has been an improvement in Kevin's willingness to answer in class.

During the second term, I concentrated on writing. The group worked towards designing their own Scots town. This exercise led to the creation of a character. The class was then given the task of describing this character in Scots. (See 'Wallaces close hoose' below.)

*A keeked through a windae at the wallaces hoose and a saw  
somebody aw posh and snobby wae wis ay complaining  
about something./She wore claes that wid o cost about twa*

*grand and gold, silver, diamond and brass which wid o cost about seven grand and a hafe./She trotted waw wee toty steps wae her neb in the air walking aw peelywally going mad./Her hoose was so smaert wae veelvet drapes at the windae and a table wae a silk cover on it she had a grand stair case anow./Ye widnae had tae keek in tae ken she wis rich./The bell at the door gaed it awa a muckle brass thing, wee'll polished./The room a keeked in wis fou o braw gids, silver teapots an canle sticks on top a shiny muckle table an the waus aw clad wae books, the widden flaire wis that sare polished ye could see yer coupon./The wifey came ben an scolded at mi, een tae een wae a stare that wid turn ye cauld. A gid her a wave afore a dooked doun and took off never tae show ma coupon around there again.*

*Matthew Fitt's comments*

*This is brilliant writin. Weel done. Ye've gien a description and ye've tellt a story, tae. Aw ye need tae dae noo tae mak it perfect is tidy it up a wee bit.*

*Here's hoo tae spell some o the Scots words ye've used.*

<i>Ah</i>	-	<i>I</i>
<i>whae</i>	-	<i>who</i>
<i>hauf</i>	-	<i>half</i>
<i>and aw</i>	-	<i>and all</i>
<i>wis</i>	-	<i>was</i>
<i>weel</i>	-	<i>well</i>
<i>waws</i>	-	<i>walls</i>
<i>widden flair</i>	-	<i>wooden floor</i>
<i>sair</i>	-	<i>sore</i>
<i>aff</i>	-	<i>off</i>
<i>around</i>	-	<i>around</i>

*Can ye think o a Scots word for 'complaining'?*

*NEW WORD: flyte at (scold at)*

Kevin's finished piece revealed much about his skill as a writer of Scots. While the other children returned before the end of the piece to writing in English, Kevin wrote consistently in Scots throughout. In addition, he took the task of writing up a description to the next step of narrative by setting in motion a story. The piece shows him beginning to develop through his writing a sense of place and perspective. Another telling feature of this piece is his attention to spelling. Kevin had already pointed out that different writers of Scots spell Scots in different ways. In his piece, he has tried to reflect the sounds of Scots words he had not yet seen written down by spelling them phonetically. With words he had seen written in the course of our sessions his spelling was exactly the way he had learned it. Kevin had lots of questions about spelling during this writing exercise.

This report has no academic data to support its findings. The course leader cannot gather data as effectively as an observer would be able to. All I can do here is to offer a record of what occurred from August to December 2004 for one hour a week at Coulter PS.

However, it is not incorrect to state that use of the Scots Language within this one young lad's schooling has had a positive effect. He has more confidence in class. He has had a boost to his self-esteem. He has been seen to be enquiring about language and spelling and has expressed a wish to read more.

It is the opinion of this report that across South Lanarkshire, there are hundreds of children in the same linguistic position as Kevin; and it is the conclusion of this report that each one of those children would benefit significantly from engaging in a structured dynamic way with the Scots Language in the classroom.

Matthew Fitt  
Itchy Coo Schools Officer

Reading Course

Kevin's enthusiasm for learning through Scots can be developed by offering him suitable Scots texts. The following titles should hold his interest and constitute a platform for further development of this young man's aptitude for reading, writing and talk in both English and Scots.

## Stories

The Hoose o Haivers, Itchy Coo, 2002

Pure Ghosters, Itchy Coo, 2002

## Poetry

King o the Midden, Itchy Coo, 2003

Blethertoun Braes, Itchy Coo, 2004

## Plays

Tam o Shanter's Big Night Oot, Itchy Coo, 2003

## Non-fiction

1745 and All That, Scoular Anderson, Birlinn, 2003

### **treblinka**

the sky at noon  
is as bleck  
as midnicht

the reek  
abinn the camp  
is as  
sleekit as  
cobras

the burns are  
manky wi  
blood  
and bits o claes  
hing on the barb wire

fae behind the yetts  
and fences  
comes the soond o weans  
and auld wifes  
chantin,  
their sweet sang  
drooned  
by the girnin  
o the craws

This poem was written by the group to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, performed at a commemoration ceremony at Hamilton Town Hall, January 27 2005