

**Applecross Primary School  
and Nursery Class  
The Highland Council  
2 September 2008**

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## 1. Background

Applecross Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in May 2008 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated nursery children's and 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 the quality of the children's experiences in the nursery, 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 school serves the village of Applecross and the surrounding very remote rural area. All pupils travel to school using school transport. At the time of the inspection the roll was 15, including two children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Well-behaved and courteous children and pupils, who were keen to learn.
- High-quality imaginative writing at all stages.
- The care and commitment of the headteacher and her staff to the nursery children and primary pupils.

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

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents, including those with children in the nursery class, pupils and staff were positive about the work of the school. Parents thought that their children enjoyed school and were well looked after while they were there. They felt that they were kept well informed about how they could help their children with homework. Almost all parents found the headteacher approachable and all thought that the school was well led. Pupils enjoyed

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<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.

being in school and thought that staff helped to keep them safe and healthy. Staff enjoyed working in school and felt that nursery children and school pupils were enthusiastic about their learning.

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

##### **Learners' experiences**

There were important weaknesses in the overall quality of the curriculum. In the nursery class, staff provided children with a wide range of enjoyable learning experiences. Staff mostly questioned children effectively and ensured that the activities set for them engaged them well. Staff did not always ensure an appropriate balance between free play and more structured adult led activities. Effective arrangements were in place to ensure that nursery children made a smooth transition into the early stages of primary school. At the primary stages, staff provided pupils with a broad range of helpful activities. These included the effective promotion of pupils' skills in imaginative writing and in written calculations. Staff developed pupils' skills in enterprise education through activities such as selling tea towels designed by pupils. These activities were not yet part of a coherent programme to build pupils' skills progressively. Pupils did not have enough opportunities to develop their problem solving skills in mathematics. There were important weaknesses in key areas, including environmental studies and expressive arts, in which the range of activities was not effectively structured. As a result, pupils did not develop appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills as they progressed through each class stage. Teachers had created a positive climate for learning. They interacted very well with pupils and used a broad range of teaching approaches, including appropriate use of homework. Teachers' explanations were mostly clear and staff were improving their use of information and communications technology (ICT) to promote pupils' learning. Teachers did not consistently share with pupils what they wanted them to learn. They did not always use questioning effectively to ensure that pupils understood what had been taught.

Learners' experiences in the nursery class were satisfactory. Children concentrated effectively on their chosen activities and mostly cooperated well. They were developing increasing confidence in solving problems and investigating. At the primary stages, learners' experiences were satisfactory. Pupils were very well motivated and worked well at the tasks set for them. They felt safe and well looked after in school and were confident in discussing aspects of their learning. Pupils' skills in learning independently at challenging activities did not develop sufficiently as they progressed through the school.

##### **Improvements in performance**

The school had made some improvements in planning activities within the nursery class and in developing homework tasks at the primary stages. Much remained to be done to ensure that tasks set for pupils in all areas of the curriculum built appropriately on their prior learning. Overall, there was satisfactory improvement in the performance of the nursery class and weak improvement in performance in the primary classes.

Children in the nursery class were making satisfactory progress in communication and language. They mostly spoke confidently to adults and to each other, and in the main listened well to instructions and stories. They were developing an appropriate awareness of print, and staff used stories and role-play well to develop children's early literacy skills.

At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in English language was satisfactory. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. For a few pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Those at the early stages were making very effective progress in developing their early literacy skills. At all stages, pupils spoke confidently to adults and to each other and most listened effectively to instructions. Almost all pupils read well from familiar texts and understood what they had read. They lacked confidence in discussing how writers achieve their effects. Pupils in the upper and middle stages used dictionaries and reference books effectively to find information. Their skills in using the Internet for research required further development. At all stages, pupils wrote effective imaginative stories with appropriate use of dialogue and lively descriptions. Pupils' skills in writing for a wider range of purposes were not appropriately developed. Pupils did not consistently use their reading and writing skills effectively in other areas of the curriculum.

In the nursery class, children were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. They sorted shapes well and used them effectively during building activities with construction toys. Children were developing their awareness of counting to ten and could recognise numbers and colours appropriately.

At the primary stages, attainment in mathematics was satisfactory. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national standards in key aspects of mathematics. A few pupils did not make sufficient progress from their previous levels of attainment. Pupils at the early stages were making effective progress in their numeracy work. At all stages, pupils gathered and recorded information effectively and displayed this information appropriately on graphs. Almost all pupils were confident in carrying out written calculations. Pupils at the middle and upper stages had an appropriate awareness of how to use the 24 hour clock. A few pupils' skills in mental calculation were not sufficiently quick and accurate. Almost all pupils had an appropriate understanding of shapes and angles. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry required considerable improvement. Too few pupils were aware of how they could solve mathematical problems effectively.

Children in the nursery class were effectively developing their knowledge and understanding of the world through participation in visits and in structured play activities. Staff used the outdoor area for activities to promote children's skills in energetic play. These activities were not always effectively focused on developing children's skills in balancing, jumping and catching.

At the primary stages, a visiting instructor ensured that pupils were developing confidence in singing and in making music through a range of effective musical activities. Most pupils from P1 to P7 were making appropriate progress in developing

their skills in French and Gaelic. In environmental studies and expressive arts, pupils did not develop their knowledge and skills systematically and effectively enough. Pupils' understanding of aspects of science was not well developed.

Staff had taken good steps to encourage pupils' personal and social development and to promote their wider achievements in this very remote school. In the nursery class, staff mostly ensured that children cooperated well with each other and shared resources appropriately. In the primary classes, pupils had improved their awareness of the environment through a range of useful activities. These included developing the school garden with a number of parents, and working with the National Trust ranger on a Pathways project. The school was working towards achieving an Eco-Schools Scotland bronze award in recognition of their work in this area. Pupils responded well to staff's provision of a range of effective activities to help them become responsible citizens. These included recycling work, and pupils' participation in raising funds for several local and international charities. Pupils at all stages were developing their awareness of good citizenship through taking part in the pupil council. Pupils benefited from after-school activities run by staff and parents. These included a drama club and a chess club. Two pupils from the school had recently reached the area chess finals in Aberdeen. Pupils developed their skills in performing for an audience in performing a play for the local community each year. The school had achieved Health Promoting School status. Staff effectively promoted healthy eating.

School staff had made some progress in improving aspects of provision identified in the school's improvement plan, but overall progress had been too slow. The audit within the school's improvement plan was not sufficiently rigorous and had not identified significant weaknesses in the curriculum, and in learning and teaching. It was not clear how the success of development projects within the improvement plan would be measured. As a result, staff were not consistently aware of appropriate priorities for development and had not focused effectively on improving key areas.

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

Overall, staff in the nursery class had satisfactory approaches to meeting children's learning needs. Staff were effectively supported by the headteacher in planning a range of helpful play activities. They recorded children's progress and mostly used this information well to plan further work. A few activities were not appropriately challenging. In the primary classes, there were important weaknesses in how well learners' needs were met. Class teachers provided useful support to individual pupils and groups of pupils. They did not consistently take appropriate account of pupils' prior attainment to ensure that learning activities met all pupils' needs effectively. As a result, some higher-attaining pupils were not sufficiently challenged.

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

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The school's arrangements to ensure the care and welfare of pupils were very good. Staff knew the nursery children and primary pupils very well and were very sensitive to their social and emotional needs. Nursery staff worked very effectively using 'Safe, Strong and Free' activities to develop children's confidence and awareness of personal safety. In the primary classes, staff provided very effective care for pupils. The headteacher had put in place a range of helpful policies to guide staff, including those for child protection and anti-bullying. Staff had undertaken appropriate training in child protection and implemented the policies for pastoral care effectively. Teachers ensured that pupils had an appropriate awareness of health issues, including personal relationships, and the dangers of substance misuse. Effective procedures were in place to support pupils entering P1 and the very small number of pupils at P7 transferring to Plockton High School.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>Accommodation had some important weaknesses. The main building was well maintained and the arrangements to ensure secure entry were appropriate. Pupils benefited from a good range of ICT equipment and helpful access to the Internet in most teaching areas. Pupils made use of the community hall, around a mile from the school, for physical education. The lack of large gymnasium equipment and safety mats hindered pupils' progress in this area. Access to parts of the school would be difficult for pupils with restricted mobility. Parts of the playing areas contained stony, rough and uneven ground which posed a potential hazard to nursery children and pupils.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	School staff had created a very positive climate, and relationships between staff and pupils were very good. All pupils were very well behaved, friendly and polite. Staff morale was high and staff worked well together. Pupils responded positively to the school's helpful system of awards, which encouraged pupils and recognised their achievements. Staff had appropriately high expectations of pupils' behaviour, but did not have consistently appropriate expectations of what pupils could achieve. All staff treated pupils equally and fairly and ensured that all pupils felt included in the life of the school. The school did not yet give sufficient attention to racial equality issues to prepare pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society. Staff provided pupils with appropriately frequent opportunities for religious observance.
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	The school was successful in working in partnership with parents. The Parent Council supported the work of the school well, and included parents of nursery children. Parents in this very remote community helped with activities in school, including constructing a flower bed and assisting on school outings. Staff kept parents well informed using regular newsletters, parents' meetings, helpful written reports on pupils' progress and informative booklets. They had consulted appropriately with parents about sensitive health education issues.

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

Applecross Primary School and Nursery Class had a number of strengths. Staff were very caring and committed and ensured that nursery children and pupils were happy, secure and confident. Nursery children were making some effective progress in key areas. Primary pupils were attaining satisfactory standards in aspects of English language and mathematics. Overall, there were important weaknesses in the school's provision. Staff did not consistently ensure that the challenge of pupils' work was appropriate. As a result, pupils' needs were not always met effectively. Too many pupils could have achieved more if more had been expected of them.

The headteacher had been in post for 19 years and was very committed to the school and to the nursery children and primary pupils. She had worked with parents and staff to improve some aspects of the school's work. These included better planning in the nursery class and improved homework arrangements at the primary stages. She had

maintained very good relationships with staff and had involved them well in discussing the school's practice. There were some important weaknesses in her leadership. She had not provided staff with sufficient guidance on learning and teaching, and had not ensured that consistently high standards were maintained throughout the school. She had not yet organised the curriculum effectively to ensure that pupils made appropriate progress in all aspects of their learning. In some areas, progress in bringing about improvements had been too slow. The school's arrangements for evaluating its work were weak overall. The headteacher had visited the nursery class and primary stage classrooms to observe learning and teaching. She had sampled pupils' work and had offered written feedback to staff and pupils. These activities were not yet sufficiently systematic and rigorous to have a significant impact on classroom practice. The headteacher did not comment appropriately on teachers' written plans. Staff had not yet used assessment information effectively to ensure that all pupils made appropriate progress in their learning. With the support of the education authority and staff, the headteacher had the capacity to improve the school.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no recommendations or requirements.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvements in:

- the quality of the curriculum to ensure that all pupils develop appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills;
- pace and challenge to ensure that pupils' learning needs are met effectively;
- the arrangements for nursery children's and primary pupils' safety within the school's playing areas; and
- arrangements for evaluating the quality of learning, teaching and attainment to ensure that all pupils make appropriate 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. HM Inspectors will engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress. They will publish an interim report on progress within one year of the publication of this report. Thereafter, HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Robert D Barfoot  
HM Inspector

2 September 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	weak
Teaching for effective learning	satisfactory
Children's experiences (nursery class)	satisfactory
Learners' experiences (primary stages)	satisfactory
Improvements in performance (nursery class)	satisfactory
Improvements in performance (primary stages)	weak

<b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b>	
Meeting learning needs (nursery class)	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs (primary stages)	weak

<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	weak
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	satisfactory
Equality and fairness	good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	good

<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Developing people and partnerships	satisfactory
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	weak
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

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. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

<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>• Parents of nursery children and primary pupils were positive about all aspects of the school.</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>• Pupils enjoyed being at school and felt that their teachers knew them well.</li><li>• Pupils thought that they had a say in making the school better.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There were no significant issues.</li></ul>

## **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 Director of Education, Culture and Sport, 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, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](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 [www.hmie.gov.uk](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@spsa.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsa.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.spsa.org.uk](http://www.spsa.org.uk).

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