

**Coulhill Primary School
Alness
The Highland Council
12 June 2007**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	2
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	4
7. Leading and improving the school	6
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	8
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	9
How can you contact us?	10

1. Background

Coulhill Primary School was inspected in February 2007 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 a representative of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents¹. There was no School Board.

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 part of the town of Alness. At the time of the inspection the roll was 325, including 72 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was below the national average.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

At the time of the inspection, six of the ten class teachers were absent and their classes were taught by supply teachers. Some classes had experienced several changes of teacher in the current session.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Very supportive and caring staff.
- Friendly, respectful and well-behaved pupils who were keen to learn.
- The attention given by staff to promoting pupils' health and to developing pupils' skills in using information and communications technology.
- Staff's encouragement of pupils through celebration of their achievements.
- The promotion of equality and fairness.

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

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

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

Parents and pupils were positive about almost all aspects of the school. Most parents felt the school was well led and had a good reputation in the local community. Around a third of them had concerns about the condition of one nursery classroom. A similar proportion wanted more information about the school's priorities for improving pupils' education. Pupils enjoyed school and were very positive about their teachers. A minority felt that some pupils were not well behaved. Staff were positive about most aspects of the school. They were positive about the pupils and found them respectful. A significant number of them felt that senior managers did not work well as a team or always communicate effectively with staff.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was good. It was appropriately balanced, and most aspects were well developed to enable pupils to make steady progress. Teachers gave very good attention to health education and to applying pupils' skills in using information and communications technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Contributions by visiting specialist teachers enhanced pupils' experiences in art and design, music and physical education (PE). The school had still to reach the national target amount of PE for pupils. At the early stages, pupils had too few opportunities to learn through play. The overall quality of teaching was good. The supply teachers were very well supported by permanent staff. Teachers often involved pupils actively in lessons. Their interactions with pupils were never less than good and often very good. They gave clear directions and explanations and often used open-ended questioning effectively to make pupils think and explain their answers. In a few lessons, teaching points were laboured too much or class activities lacked the variety needed to sustain pupils' enthusiasm. Increasingly, teachers were clarifying for pupils what they expected them to learn. They provided helpful feedback to pupils in English language and mathematics, though less consistently in other areas. Homework was regular and suitably varied.

The quality of pupils' learning was good. Teachers had established a positive and encouraging climate in all classes. Pupils were keen to learn and good at staying on task. They participated actively and responsibly in lessons. They showed good levels of individuality and creativity during practical work in art and design and technology. They had many good opportunities to learn from each other by collaborating in pairs or groups. They sorted shapes together well in mathematics in P1/2 and composed imaginative musical pieces in groups in P6. Pupils at P7 used ICT effectively to prepare joint presentations to the class. Occasionally, pupils did not sustain their collaboration well because the task did not motivate them enough. Opportunities for pupils to develop skills of independent learning were uneven across classes. In the majority of lessons, the pace of progress was good or very good. The school took appropriate steps to promote pupils' wider achievements. Pupils were

very friendly, polite and courteous. They were generally very supportive towards each other. At P6/P7, pupils looked after the younger ones responsibly, involving them in playground games, and helping them to use ICT. Pupils on the pupil council and school nutrition action group effectively gathered pupils' views about the school, including their views on the quality of school meals. Those on the Eco School Scotland group had won a bronze award for caring for the environment. All pupils had helped to design the school garden. Pupils developed positive attitudes to lifestyle choices through their participation in Healthy Highland Week. Pupils supported charities well. After-school activities, although recently limited, were now being extended. The school athletics team had performed well in area competitions.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. There had been no particular change in attainment. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in reading and writing. Almost all pupils at the early stages were progressing well. Pupils who were unable to reach national levels were making good progress in work suited to their needs. Across the school, pupils had well developed skills in listening and talking to adults and to each other in groups. They could convey information and express their views confidently and clearly, and were developing good skills in presenting to an audience. The school did not maintain reliable records of pupils' attainment in listening and talking. Pupils had very positive attitudes to reading and most read regularly for pleasure. At all stages, most pupils read with fluency and good understanding. At the upper stages, they applied their research and reference skills effectively to topics in environmental studies. Pupils had a secure knowledge about language. At all stages, most could write well in a variety of styles. They applied their skills effectively in different contexts to produce well-developed pieces of writing.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Attainment had been improving. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in key aspects of mathematics. Progress was strongest at the early stages. Those who were unable to reach national levels were progressing well in work adjusted to their needs. In information handling, pupils could carry out surveys and interpret graphs well. They showed well-developed skills in using computer applications, including spreadsheets, to process and present data. Most pupils were skilful in working with numbers and performing mental calculations. They coped well with various measurement tasks, although some had difficulty in working with area and volume. At the upper stages, some pupils showed too little knowledge about angles and symmetry. Skills in problem-solving and enquiry were weaker than in other areas of mathematics. However, the majority of pupils could solve mathematical problems systematically.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Overall, the school's approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were good. Teachers and classroom support staff provided very good support to pupils. The tasks set for pupils were usually suitably challenging, but occasionally too repetitive. Tasks were matched closely to pupils' prior attainment in English language and mathematics, though less systematically in other areas of work. Staff effectively identified pupils who required additional help. The two support for learning teachers worked well with identified groups of pupils in English language and mathematics. They consulted well with class teachers and advised them effectively on approaches to use with specific pupils. The school had made a good start to setting pupils individual targets for improving their work. Each pupil had learning targets to meet in personal, social and health education, and aspects of English language and mathematics. Some pupils with additional support needs benefited from individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which were based on clearly defined learning targets and criteria to measure their progress. Class teachers were involved in reviewing the progress of pupils with IEPs, but were not sufficiently involved in setting their targets. Pupils with Records of Needs received well managed support and their needs were reviewed appropriately.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	Staff provided a very high level of care for pupils. They knew pupils well as individuals and were sensitive to their needs. A children's services worker based in the school provided a valuable link between school and families. Playground supervision of pupils was very good. Staff were well acquainted with child protection procedures and dealt appropriately with any reported instances of bullying. The school gave very good attention to promoting pupils' health, including healthy eating. It had achieved success as a Health Promoting School. The school was extending the range of physical activities for pupils to develop their fitness. Effective transfer arrangements were in place for nursery children entering P1 and P7 pupils entering Alness Academy.

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. Security arrangements were appropriate. The building was mostly well maintained, but one nursery classroom was in an unsatisfactory condition. Other teaching areas were bright, pleasant and well-furnished. There were additional spacious areas for practical work, an attractive and well-used library, and good ICT facilities. Loose carpeting in the well-equipped gymnasium was potentially hazardous. The attractive canteen was too small in size, with insufficient provision for pupils taking packed lunches. Access and fire exits were difficult for disabled users to negotiate.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school was very welcoming. Morale amongst pupils was high. They had appropriate opportunities to give their views about the school. Staff morale was more variable but good overall. Pupils showed high standards of behaviour, and respect for staff and each other. Assemblies provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance and for strong celebration of pupils' achievements. Staff set high expectations of pupils' behaviour and contributions to the work of classes. They used praise and rewards consistently to encourage pupils. Teachers had taken various steps to raise attainment, with clear improvement evident in mathematics. Permanent teachers had not always ensured that pupils' progress was fully sustained as they moved through the school. Pupils were treated fairly and equally. Those with additional support needs or different cultural and religious backgrounds were very sensitively and effectively included. Staff were informed about the school's racial equality policy and used it appropriately when necessary.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school communicated well with parents and regularly sought their views about its work. Written communications, including regular newsletters, were informative. The headteacher gave parents detailed information about the school's development plans. Staff had organised helpful workshops for parents on matters such as health education, behaviour policy and target-setting for pupils. Parents lacked information about standards and quality in the school, including levels of attainment. Reports to parents included some useful advice on ways to assist their children's learning. Attendances at some parents' meetings were high. A few parents were actively involved in helping at the school.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The PTA provided good support through fund-raising and helping at school events. Links with the community were limited, but included positive contacts with the school chaplains, police, community warden and senior citizens. Some useful working partnerships had been developed with associated schools. There were no links with local businesses.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Staff at Coulhill Primary School were providing a good standard of education for pupils and gave a high level of attention to their care and welfare. Pupils were very positive about school and were polite, friendly and helpful. They were keen to learn, and worked hard and behaved responsibly in all classes. The permanent staff and supply teachers collaborated fully to minimise the effects of changes of teacher on pupils' learning. Teachers supported and encouraged pupils very effectively and met their differing learning needs well overall. Pupils achieved good standards of work. The school needed to seek further ways to interest and involve parents in their children's learning.

The headteacher provided good leadership. She had established the structures for effective learning and raising attainment, and provided clear direction for developing the school. The curriculum, the organisation of resources, and arrangements for quality assurance had all been improved. She kept staff up-to-date on professional matters and involved them well in decision-making. Her communication with staff was mostly effective. Aspects of teamwork required attention. Some divisions were evident amongst the permanent teaching staff and their responses to development work were not consistently positive. This hindered the school's capacity to improve. Leadership across the school was adequate. The depute headteacher had been in post for six months. Staff viewed her as very approachable and supportive. The duties she had been delegated so far were insufficient to develop her full potential. The principal teacher fulfilled her remit very well. She effectively promoted teachers' use of ICT. A few unpromoted teachers fulfilled other assigned duties effectively. Approaches to self-evaluation were good. Parents and pupils were well consulted about aspects of the school. Teachers worked well together to review aspects of their work and used their findings in development planning. The headteacher and depute systematically monitored teachers' plans and classroom practice. They examined pupils' jotters and tracked their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers were positive about the helpful feedback they received. The headteacher and depute required to engage more directly with pupils to help to evaluate their progress.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve aspects of staff teamwork and partnership with parents and the community. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- provide pupils at the early stages with appropriate opportunities to learn through play;
- involve parents and the community more actively in pupils' learning, and provide parents annually with a clear view of standards and quality in the school; and
- improve teamwork and working relationships within the senior management team and across the permanent teaching staff to secure the school's capacity to improve pupils' learning and raise attainment.

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. Within two years of the publication of this report parents will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Dr Tom Straiton
HM Inspector

12 June 2007

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.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents and the community	adequate

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	good
Leadership across the school	adequate
Self-evaluation	good

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
adequate	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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed school and found school work stimulating and challenging. • Staff made parents feel welcome in the school. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About a third of parents wanted more information about the school's priorities for improving pupils' education. • A similar minority had concerns about the condition of the building.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability. • Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they found work difficult. • Teachers told them how they were getting on with their work. • Teachers checked their homework. • The school helped them to stay safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About a third of pupils felt that pupils could be better behaved.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • There was mutual respect between staff and pupils. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • They were aware of the school's child protection procedures. • Pupils' success was regularly celebrated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About half of the staff wanted senior managers to operate more effectively as a team. • About a third of them wanted senior managers to communicate more effectively with staff.

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.

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 Unit, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail 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.

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. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

Crown Copyright 2007

HM Inspectorate of Education

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.