

**Dingwall Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Highland Council
13 May 2008**

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1. Background

Dingwall Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in January 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, Gaelic and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience 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 parents¹.

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 the town of Dingwall. At the time of the inspection the roll was 547, including 67 children in the nursery class and 54 pupils in the Gaelic-medium classes. The school provides education for primary and nursery pupils in the town and wider community who are deaf. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

Evaluations in this report, except where otherwise indicated, apply equally to the Gaelic-medium and English-medium classes.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Attainment in Gaelic language.
- The positive school climate and the quality of care and welfare.
- The school's success in involving parents in pupils' learning.
- Effective staff team work and their commitment to the life of the school.
- Leadership of the headteacher.

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 were positive about almost all aspects of school life. They felt their children enjoyed being at school and that the school had a very good reputation in the community. They appreciated the care and attention given to their children. Parents of children in the nursery and across the school commented on the open and warm welcome they received. Parents found nursery and school staff very approachable. They noted that all enquiries were dealt with promptly. Pupils in the primary classes and parents felt that pupils were treated fairly by staff. Parents were unhappy with the succinct format of the mid-year pupil reports and the dilapidated nursery accommodation. Pupils were proud of their school and enjoyed the range of outwith-school-hours clubs and activities provided. Many talked eagerly about gaining points for their house. Staff were very positive about the school and enjoyed working in it. They praised staff teamwork, and thought that pupils were keen to learn and willing to work hard. Parents and staff thought the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Children in the nursery were confident and familiar with the daily routines. Staff provided them with a safe, stimulating and welcoming environment. Children chose independently from a range of good quality resources and activities. Across all stages of the primary school, and in the Gaelic-medium classes and base for deaf pupils, the curriculum was good. Teachers provided pupils with a wide range of activities to develop their skills in areas such as environmental studies and enterprise education. A few aspects of topics being studied were not appropriately updated and lacked relevance. Specialist teachers made effective contributions to pupils' learning in physical education (PE) and music. Health education topics were well integrated across the curriculum. The school had taken steps towards providing pupils with two hours of high quality PE each week, in line with national recommendations. Across the primary stages, and in the nursery class, there were regular opportunities for children to develop confidence and skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT). The quality of teaching was good overall, with a few very good examples. Staff in the nursery interacted effectively with the children. They intervened sensitively and appropriately to extend children's learning and develop their skills. Approaches to teaching were not consistently high across the school. Most teachers made effective use of praise, gave clear explanations and made good use of questioning to check pupils' understanding. A few made very good use of visual approaches to support and include all learners. Most staff shared the purpose of learning with pupils. Where appropriate, staff made effective use of sign language to communicate with deaf pupils. Most teachers provided pupils with guidance on how to improve their work. This was not consistent across the school. Homework was a regular feature of school life and well matched to learning in class.

The overall quality of learning was good. In the nursery classes, children had good opportunities to experience role-play and played imaginatively in the cave corner. A few made good use of the wide selection of materials to create a variety of art work. Children were developing skills of observation and investigation through a walk in the surrounding environment. They were becoming aware of technology in using torches and computers. Almost all were developing an appropriate range of physical skills and had regular opportunities to exercise outdoors. In the Gaelic classes, at the early stages, pupils had good opportunities to acquire and develop Gaelic language skills through play. Across the primary stages, pupils were diligent, hard working learners. They listened well and followed instructions. Pupils were highly motivated when given practical and active tasks. Across the school, when given the opportunity, most pupils worked very well together in pairs and small groups. The pace of learning was not consistently brisk across the school. At the early stages, too many play activities lacked challenge and were only offered to pupils after the completion of other tasks.

The school placed a strong and effective emphasis on developing pupils' wider achievements. Children in the nursery class cooperated well in their play. They were developing an appropriate awareness of the needs of others and building friendships. Across the primary stages, pupils were developing a very good awareness of their responsibilities to themselves and one another. They were given good opportunities to make decisions during class activities and through the pupil council. They had made improvements to outdoor play equipment. Pupils regularly took part in a range of cultural and sporting activities. Activities afternoons enabled pupils to develop skills in areas of their choice. They had achieved success in Rotary Club quizzes and at the Gaelic Mod. Pupils developed performance skills by regularly singing at the Dingwall Street Fair and at a range of community events. The annual residential experience for pupils at P7 developed their social skills well. All of the pupils had been involved in developing a series of short films and producing a DVD to celebrate the Highland Year of Culture. Pupils enjoyed attending a wide range of outwith-school-hours activities. Pupils attending the film and animation club had extended their skills in ICT by setting up a school Blogspot. This had now been extended across several classes. All pupils learned signing skills in preparing and singing hymns for assembly. Pupils' awareness of the needs of others was developed by regular fundraising for a range of local and international charities. This aspect of school life was well supported by parents and the wider community.

English language

The overall quality of the pupils' learning in English language was good. In the nursery classes, children were making good progress in communication and language. They spoke confidently and listened well to adults and to one another. The children enjoyed stories and had opportunities to access information books. Most were able to recognise their own name in print. A few were developing effective skills in early writing. In the primary classes, pupils' attainment in writing had shown an improving trend over the last five years. Attainment in reading had remained steady. There was no consistent approach to evaluating listening and talking. Most pupils were achieving the appropriate national levels in reading and writing, with one-third of pupils achieving these earlier than would normally be expected. Additional time had been allocated to improving pupils' attainment in reading and this was showing early signs

of success. The revised whole school approach to reading was also contributing to this improvement. Pupils with additional support needs, including deaf pupils, were making good progress. Almost all pupils listened attentively and were very good at following instructions. Pupils in P1 could read sentences and answer questions on content accurately. Pupils in P7 read fluently and could talk in detail about the stories they were reading. They were less confident in expressing their feelings and opinions about texts or authors. At all stages, pupils read for enjoyment. A popular book bag scheme had been introduced to encourage boys' reading and was showing early signs of success. Across the school, pupils wrote regularly for a range of purposes. This included writing across the curriculum. Most pupils produced written work of good quality and appropriate length.

Gaelic language

In the Gaelic nursery classes, children were making good progress in acquiring language skills in Gaelic. They used simple phrases to describe the weather and to communicate with others. Most listened carefully at story time and were able to recall the sequence of events. Across the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in Gaelic language was very good. In recent years, the level of pupils' attainment in reading and writing had improved consistently. A few pupils had achieved national levels earlier than might normally be expected. At all stages, pupils were attentive and responded well to instructions and information. They talked confidently to adults and were developing discussion skills well. In reading, almost all pupils showed enjoyment and understanding of the texts read and discussed features of books. At all stages, pupils were able to write in a range of styles and for a variety of purposes. Pupils in the P1 class were developing effective early writing skills. In P2 and P3, pupils wrote imaginative postcards and pupils at the upper stages composed expressive poems. Standards of handwriting and presentation were good at all stages.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery were making good progress in early mathematics. They showed good recognition of simple shapes and explored shapes in the environment. A few were developing a good understanding of measurement vocabulary. Most were able to count and match number cards and objects correctly. In the primary classes the overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Attainment had shown an improving trend in recent years. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in key aspects of mathematics. Pupils with additional support needs, including deaf pupils, were making steady progress. At several stages, pupils were not being sufficiently challenged in their coursework. Pupils at P1 had made a good start to their development of mathematical skills. In some classes, pupils' skills in using ICT for information handling were not well developed. Across the stages, most pupils were skilful in mental and written calculations. At P2, pupils were confident in using money. Pupils had a good knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shapes. By P7, most pupils were confident using skills in measurement and were beginning to make effective use of a range of strategies to solve problems. Regular opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in practical and real-life situations were not consistent across the school.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

In the nursery classes, staff knew the children well and were very responsive to individual needs. They carefully observed children during play and effectively recorded stages of their development and learning. Individuals with additional support needs were identified early and were well supported by staff. The provision for meeting pupils' learning needs across the school was good. Most teachers made good use of a range of approaches to match tasks to pupils' different needs. Across the school, English language, Gaelic language and mathematics activities met the needs of most pupils. In these areas teachers took good account of pupils' prior learning. Across other curriculum areas, lessons were often targeted at whole class groups and were not sufficiently responsive to the needs of all pupils. In a few lessons the pace of learning was too slow. The additional support needs teacher worked effectively across the school supporting a wide range of pupils experiencing difficulty with their work. Appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) with clear learning targets had been developed for a number of pupils. These IEPs were regularly reviewed and appropriately shared with pupils and parents. Partner agencies, including the children's support worker, effectively contributed towards meeting learning needs through regular work with pupils and their families. Support staff made a positive contribution to assisting individuals and groups of pupils. The school was striving to meet the needs of pupils for whom English was an additional language. There were considerable staff development needs in this area.

Meeting the needs of deaf pupils

Staff identified the communication and learning needs of deaf pupils effectively. There was an appropriate emphasis placed on developing pupils' signed and spoken language. Staff made effective use of visual timetables and prompts to support pupils who had a wider range of additional support needs. Teachers of the deaf and learning support assistants supported pupils well in classes. Pupils were able to follow well what was being taught. Additional tutorial support was carefully planned to ensure pupils did not miss out on aspects of the curriculum. An on-site speech and language therapist provided high quality support to pupils with additional support needs. Deaf pupils were well involved in the life of the school. Classroom teachers used sign language competently to communicate directly with deaf pupils. A deaf adult who visited the school weekly provided very good support for deaf pupils. This included in-depth discussion of current affairs and events. On occasion, deaf pupils were over supported with too many adults engaged in their learning.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>Staff in the school and nursery provided pupils with high quality care. Staff listened to pupils' concerns and acted swiftly to resolve any issues. The janitor made a positive contribution to the life and work of the school. All staff placed a high priority on pupils' care and welfare. They were fully aware of child protection procedures and worked effectively together to create a climate of mutual trust, respect and confidence. Staff in the nursery effectively encouraged children to play safely and to take care of themselves and one another. Senior pupils acted as buddies to younger pupils and organised playground games. Pupils were developing positive attitudes to their health and wellbeing through participation in regular health promotion activities and events. Children in the nursery enjoyed varied healthy snacks and were involved in a dental health programme. School lunches were popular with pupils, well presented and of good quality. The school had supportive arrangements in place at points of transfer from the nursery into P1 and at P7 into Dingwall Academy.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The quality of space for learning was good. School classrooms were spacious, bright and attractive and the main school building was well maintained. Nursery staff had created a pleasant play environment in dilapidated hutted accommodation. In the primary classes, staff had created attractive displays of pupils' work around the school to illustrate and celebrate pupils' achievements. The gymnasium was well used for PE, drama and assemblies. Pupils enjoyed healthy choices and social time with their friends in the separate dining area. There were no changing facilities for PE. Pupils benefited from a large playground and playing field with high quality climbing equipment. The children in the nursery made regular use of the school gymnasium and had daily access to an enclosed outdoor play area. There was access only to the ground floor of the school for those with restricted mobility. Appropriate security arrangements were in place at the entrance to the school and the nursery.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	<p>Climate and relationships within the school were very good. Staff ensured a very welcoming atmosphere and were very committed to the life and work of the school. Pupils were proud of their school. They were polite and very well behaved. Pupil and staff morale was high. The school had appropriate opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' achievements. Pupils' wider achievements were celebrated at assembly, and certificates and photographs were well displayed around the school. Staff used praise effectively to promote good behaviour and encourage pupils to work hard. Expectations of attainment and presentation of work were high. Learning about equality and fairness was a regular feature of religious and moral education and personal and social development activities. In a few topics, staff did not always ensure that they used appropriate terminology.</p>
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	<p>The school was very successful in involving parents, carers and families. The school and nursery communicated effectively with parents through regular newsletters and home link books. Almost all parents attended parent interviews. The annual curriculum fairs were very informative and well supported and appreciated by parents and pupils. Teachers and nursery staff produced annual progress reports for parents using the local authority report form. The mid-year reports were brief and offered limited information about each child. However, the end of year reports were more detailed. There was scope to improve the quality of the reporting format. Parents and the community, including local businesses, actively supported social and fundraising events throughout the school year. The local Rotary Club supported helpful cycling proficiency each year. Children's services workers helped train pupils to become confident playground helpers. Pupils performed a range of successful musical and dramatic performances for parents and the local community. Community police officers effectively supported activities such as awareness-raising on substance misuse and safe internet use. The school had consulted with parents on the resources used for health education.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Dingwall Primary School and Nursery Class provided a good quality of education for its pupils. There was a strong climate of care, trust and respect across the school and parents were very supportive of the school. Staff were actively engaged in all aspects of the life and work of the school. Pupils had positive attitudes towards the school and worked hard. Attainment was good in English language and mathematics and very good in Gaelic language. Deaf pupils were well integrated in the life of the school. The quality of learning and teaching was good and on occasion very good.

The leadership of the headteacher was very good. He was very well respected by pupils, staff and the community. He had established and sustained a warm and welcoming learning environment. His approachable manner was appreciated and valued by staff and parents. The headteacher had developed productive partnerships with parents, other schools and the local community. He had a clear vision for the school based on an understanding of the community and the needs of the pupils and their families. He visited every class every day and knew all pupils as individuals. He was well supported by the three depute headteachers and the two principal teachers. The nursery and Gaelic-medium classes were led well by the depute headteachers. There was very effective teamwork across the school. The management team had established a good range of activities to evaluate the work of the school. The headteacher and depute headteachers reviewed teachers' plans and gave encouraging, written and verbal feedback. This did not always challenge staff to improve. They visited the nursery and primary classes to review aspects of learning and teaching and regularly sampled pupils' work. There was scope across the school to share and model good practice, to develop consistently high quality learning and teaching. The school had the capacity to improve provision for pupils.

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 was one requirement and no recommendations. The requirement had been addressed.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to ensure further improvement in the work of the nursery and the school. In doing so they should take account of the need to improve the:

- quality of the curriculum;
- quality of learning and teaching;
- arrangements to meet the needs of pupils for whom English was an additional language;
- accommodation for the nursery classes; and
- effectiveness of self-evaluation activities in order to better meet children's learning needs.

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.

Susan R Duff
HM Inspector

13 May 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.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
The curriculum	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Learners' experiences	good
Improvement in performance: English language	good
Improvement in performance: Gaelic language	very good
Improvement in performance: mathematics	good

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

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

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	good
Improvement through 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"> • Children enjoyed being at school. • Their children found school stimulating and challenging. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell them more about children's strengths and weaknesses. • Improve school reports. • Keep them informed about the school's priorities for improvement.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers helped them when they were having difficulty with their school work and explained things clearly. • They had a say in making the school better. • Teachers expected them to work hard. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour. • Make clear what pupils should do if they are upset.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All teachers and support staff enjoyed working in the school and were happy with almost all aspects of school life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few staff wanted more opportunity to be involved in the decision making process and improved communication across the school.

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, Longman East, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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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. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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