

**Tarbat Old Primary School
and Nursery Class
Portmahomack
The Highland Council
2 September 2008**

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1. Background

Tarbat Old 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 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 school serves the village of Portmahomack, near Tain, and the surrounding area. The recently appointed headteacher had been in post for four weeks. At the time of the inspection the roll was 29, including six children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Children's experiences and learning in the nursery.
- The commitment of all staff to the care and welfare of primary pupils and nursery children.
- Attainment in reading.
- The help provided to pupils by support for learning staff and the classroom assistant.

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.

All parents, including parents of children in the nursery class, were positive about most aspects of the school. They felt welcome in school and found parents' evenings helpful

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

and informative. Only half of parents thought that the school had a good reputation in the community. Pupils were very positive about the school and enjoyed being there. They felt that teachers explained things clearly and that the school helped them to stay safe and healthy. All staff liked working in the school and were very positive about almost all aspects of school life.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Learners' experiences

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. In the nursery, staff provided a safe and welcoming environment for learning. They promoted children's independence and social skills well and encouraged children to choose healthy foods to eat. Children chose independently from a range of resources and activities. At the primary stages, the curriculum provided pupils with a broad and well balanced range of learning opportunities. Staff ensured that all pupils had an appropriate amount of good quality physical education each week. In the P1-3 class, topic work provided effective opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in writing, mathematics and enterprise education. Pupils in the P4-7 class skilfully used information and communications technology (ICT) to support their learning. Staff did not systematically develop pupils' skills in ICT in the early stages. The quality of teaching was good overall. In the nursery class, staff interacted very positively with children and made good use of the local community to provide stimulating learning experiences. In the primary classes, staff used thoughtful questioning to check pupils' understanding and made good use of praise to encourage pupils. Teachers effectively shared the aims of most lessons with pupils and gave clear explanations and instructions. They held pupils' attention by involving them actively in learning experiences linked to interesting real-life contexts. Homework activities lacked variety and, in the upper stages, did not provide pupils with sufficient challenge.

Learners' experiences in the nursery class were very good. Children expressed themselves creatively in their paintings and drawings. They used role play well in the nursery café they had created. They were learning to climb, slide and play games with balls in the outdoor play area. Staff took good account of children's interests and ideas for activities. Learners' experiences at the primary stages were good. In the early stages, pupils were enthusiastic and motivated learners. They worked well independently and in small groups and learned effectively through play. In the upper stages, pupils responded well to positive feedback and were developing an understanding of what they needed to do to improve. Most pupils in the P4-7 class were enthusiastic learners. A few pupils gave good support to other pupils as learning buddies.

Improvements in performance

The school had successfully improved its performance in a number of important areas. Overall, this amounted to a good improvement in the performance of the nursery class and the primary classes.

Children in the nursery class were making very good progress in the development of communication and language skills. They listened well to instructions and talked confidently to adults and each other. They enjoyed stories and listened attentively. Many chose to look at books independently. Children used language well in play situations. They used effective dialogue and developed their early writing skills in taking and recording orders in the nursery café.

In English language, pupils at the primary stages achieved good standards in reading and writing. At the early and middle stages most pupils achieved appropriate national levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress in their coursework. Throughout the school, most pupils listened attentively to their teacher and each other and responded appropriately. They expressed their ideas clearly. Almost all showed confidence in expressing their opinions 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 were making very good progress in reading and by P7 almost all were skilled and confident readers. They commented effectively on books they had chosen to read for enjoyment. Pupils wrote well for a range of purposes and audiences. Across the stages, most pupils demonstrated a good knowledge about language. A few pupils did not present their written work neatly.

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. They could identify simple shapes, colours and patterns effectively. They were able to use and understand appropriate mathematical language. Most could recognise numbers and count to ten. Children's skills in investigating and solving simple mathematical problems were not sufficiently well developed.

In mathematics, pupils at the primary stages achieved good standards and most pupils achieved appropriate national levels. At the early stages, almost all pupils achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who were not achieving national levels were making sound progress in their learning. Across the stages, pupils could interpret and draw an appropriate range of graphs. Those in the P1-3 class had conducted a range of surveys and presented their findings in graph form. Pupils at P6 and P7 were skilful in using ICT to organise and present information using databases and spreadsheets. At P1 to P3, pupils were making good progress in adding and subtracting. At all stages, pupils showed appropriate skills in mental and written calculations. Pupils in the P4-7 class were able to accurately measure length in a wide range of practical situations. A few pupils at P6 were not sufficiently skilled in dealing with calculations involving fractions. In the early and middle stages, most pupils had a sound knowledge of the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Pupils in P6 and P7 were not confident in measuring and naming angles. Across the stages, pupils were not sufficiently confident in solving mathematical problems systematically.

Pupils in the P1-3 class were enthusiastically developing a good knowledge of senses as part of their health education and science project. In drama, pupils in the early stages had recently prepared and performed a successful puppet show for older pupils. Pupils in the P4-7 class were effectively learning a range of practical skills in technology and had a good understanding of each stage in the design process. Across the school, pupils produced varied and interesting work in art. Pupils in the P4-7 class

had developed their awareness of responsible citizenship by successfully planning and holding a mini-election.

The school took some steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Children in the nursery class were developing confidence as learners through well-planned visits in the community. They learned social skills and an awareness of healthy foods. At the primary stages, pupils successfully planned, prepared and performed regular, well attended concerts for elderly residents in the community. A few pupils at P4 to P7 took part in a range of after-school clubs run by parents and members of the local community. These included art and craft, football and skipping clubs. The school nutrition group successfully collected recipes to help promote the importance of making sensible healthy choices. The newly formed pupil council was not yet sufficiently involved in making decisions to contribute to school improvements. Pupils responded well to opportunities to show care and consideration for others within and outwith the school. All pupils helped each other in the playground and the 'Best Buddies' awards scheme successfully rewarded positive behaviour. Pupils regularly held fundraising events and contributed to a variety of charities. This had developed their understanding of the needs of others.

The school improvement plan had been written prior to the headteacher taking up her post. The school had made little progress in overtaking the priorities in the current improvement plan. The school had successfully organised a programme of assemblies at which pupils' achievements were celebrated. Staff had reviewed the opportunities for learning through play in the nursery and early stages classes.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Staff in the nursery class supported children very well and were sensitive and responsive to the needs of individuals. They assessed children's progress regularly and built on children's individual needs and interests very effectively. Children responded well to very good opportunities to select activities independently, including using a computer. At the primary stages, approaches to meeting learners' needs were satisfactory. Teachers matched most tasks and activities well to the needs of learners. The pace of learning was appropriate for most pupils but did not always provide sufficient challenge, particularly for higher achieving pupils. A few lessons delivered to the whole class did not meet the needs of all learners. Pupils were given very effective support by learning support staff and the classroom assistant. Learning support staff consulted effectively with class teachers. Pupils with individualised educational programmes (IEPs) were making sound progress towards their short- and long-term learning targets. Staff successfully involved parents in reviewing the progress of pupils with IEPs but did not consistently keep a formal record of reviews.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The nursery and primary classes had very good arrangements to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils. In the nursery class, staff were caring and responsive to pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. They knew what to do in relation to safeguarding pupils. They effectively developed children's skills in keeping safe through stimulating workshops with a partner agency. In the primary classes, all staff had received appropriate training in child protection. They were confident about what they had to do if they had any concerns about pupils' welfare. Appropriate procedures were in place for the safe administration of medicines, safe use of the Internet and action against bullying. Staff encouraged healthy eating and made good use of the outdoor environment to promote pupils' regular exercise. The school monitored pupils' absence rigorously. Arrangements for the transfer from the nursery to P1 and from P7 to Tain Royal Academy were very effective.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The overall management of resources for learning was good. Staff had worked well to ensure that the spacious and well-maintained building provided a stimulating learning environment. Pupils' work was well displayed and good use was made of photographs. The canteen and separate hall were of good size and provided appropriate space for physical education and drama activities. Building security arrangements were appropriate. The grassed outdoor play area provided a valuable resource for exercise and learning. The playground had an uneven surface and lacked stimulating activities for play. The school building and toilets were not easily accessible by users or visitors with restricted mobility.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	Staff and most pupils identified strongly with the school. Staff had made effective use of informal opportunities to share new ideas and good practice. In the early stages, almost all pupils were well behaved, polite and enthusiastic learners. A few pupils in the middle and upper primary stages were less enthusiastic and did not always behave responsibly in class or in the playground. Staff treated pupils fairly and had appropriate expectations for pupils' attendance and behaviour. Expectations for the presentation of pupils' work were not consistently high. Pupils' successes in the school and in the local community were celebrated well in Achievement Newsletters and in Star Assemblies. There were regular opportunities for religious observance. Staff had not yet received appropriate training in race equality. Pupils successfully learned about other religions through the curriculum in religious and moral education. The school did not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of other cultures or to recognise and deal with discrimination.
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	Weekly newsletters to parents provided helpful information about the school and about pupils' achievements. The school had sought the views of parents on its performance. Parents regarded parents' evenings, which were very well attended, as informative. They felt that information they had been given to help support children's homework had been helpful. They did not have a clear idea of the school's priorities for improvement. The school had not been successful in fully involving parents in the life of the school. A few parents contributed to school activities by running after-school activities, for example, golf, for pupils. The Parent Council had only recently been established and had not yet made a significant impact. School staff were given effective support by a range of partner agencies including the school nurse and dental health service.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Tarbat Old Primary School provided a positive and caring environment for learning. The quality of teaching and of pupils' learning experiences was good. Most pupils were polite, well behaved and had a positive attitude to their learning. Almost all pupils were confident and articulate. A few pupils in the upper stages were less

responsible in their behaviour and commitment to learning. Nursery staff and teachers were very committed to the school and knew their children well. Standards of attainment in English language and mathematics were good overall but there was headroom for improvement. Support staff provided effective support for learning, particularly for pupils in the early stages.

At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had newly taken up post. During this short period of time, she had quickly and accurately identified most of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She had already gained the support and confidence of her staff. She had consulted staff well and involved them in evaluating aspects of the school's work. The pace of change and improvement had been too slow. The headteacher recognised the need to improve partnership working with parents and the local community and to track pupils' progress more effectively. Teachers had collaborated informally to share good practice. They did not have responsibility for leading any school priorities. This session, teachers had not made full and effective use of their professional development time. The school had appropriate procedures to evaluate its work. These procedures were not presently being fully implemented. Staff were given opportunities to evaluate the work of the school but had little involvement in the school's improvement plan. The school had also sought the views of parents and pupils about its work. The priorities outlined in the school's improvement plan did not yet take sufficient account of the views of parents, pupils and staff. With the continued support of all staff and from the authority the school had the capacity to improve.

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 two recommendations. These had been addressed satisfactorily.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve aspects of teamwork and meeting learning needs. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve learning activities at the primary stages to meet the needs of all learners;
- ensure that all staff are fully involved in leading improvements within the school;
- improve approaches to self-evaluation and monitoring pupils' progress to ensure continued improvements in learning, teaching and attainment; and
- develop more effective partnerships with parents and the community.

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.

Alistair Brown
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.

How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	
The curriculum	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Children's experiences (nursery class)	very good
Learners' experiences (primary stages)	good
Improvements in performance (nursery class)	good
Improvements in performance (primary stages)	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs (nursery class)	very good
Meeting learning needs (primary stages)	satisfactory

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	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	satisfactory

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	satisfactory
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • Parents of nursery children were very positive about all aspects of the nursery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the reputation of the school in the local community. • Give a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They enjoyed being in school, felt safe while there and had a say in deciding how to make the school better. • Teachers told them when they had done something well and helped them when they were having difficulty with their classwork. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were pleased with almost all aspects of the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few staff felt that time for their professional development could be used more effectively.

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.

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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.

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

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