

**Craighill Primary School
and Nursery Classes
Tain
The Highland Council
18 March 2008**

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1. Background

Craighill Primary School and nursery classes were inspected in December 2007 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 language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined the quality of the children's experience in the nurseries, 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 north-western area of the town of Tain. At the time of the inspection the roll was 334, including 41 children in the nursery classes. Forty-four pupils were in three primary Gaelic-medium classes and eight children were in the Gaelic-medium 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.

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.

- Partnership with parents and the wider community.
- The leadership of the headteacher.
- Pupils' attainment in Gaelic language in the Gaelic-medium classes.
- The promotion and celebration of pupils' wider achievements.
- Effective transition arrangements from the nursery to P1 and from P7 to S1.

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, staff and pupils were very positive about the work of the school. All parents of nursery children felt welcome in the nursery and thought that their children were well cared for there. At the primary stages almost all parents thought that the school was well led and that parents' evenings were helpful and informative. All parents felt that the school had helped to explain to them how they could support their children with their homework. Pupils were pleased with almost all aspects of the school. Almost all felt safe and well looked after in school and enjoyed being there. A quarter of pupils expressed concerns about the behaviour of other pupils. Staff were very positive about working in the school and praised the effective communication with senior managers. A few support staff would have liked more opportunities to be involved in making decisions.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum was good. In the nursery classes, children chose independently from a wide range of activities. They had appropriate opportunities to learn through well planned play activities. At the primary stages, staff had planned a broad and balanced range of experiences for pupils. At the early stages, pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to learn through play. Staff had effectively allocated additional time within the school week to English language and mathematics. The school had recently allocated some additional time for physical education (PE) but had not yet succeeded in providing two hours each week for all pupils, in line with national recommendations. Visiting specialist teachers made a positive contribution to pupils' development in art and design, music and PE. Staff did not systematically develop pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT) throughout the school. The quality of teaching was good overall with some examples of very effective teaching. Almost all teachers were well organised and gave clear explanations. Most teachers interacted well with pupils and taught whole class groups effectively. Too few teachers consistently shared the aims of lessons with pupils or reviewed learning at the end of lessons. Homework was set regularly and helped to reinforce pupils' learning in class.

The overall quality of pupils' learning was adequate. In the nurseries, children effectively developed their awareness of space and engaged in energetic physical activity outdoors on the climbing frame. They were able to express themselves confidently through their paintings and collage work. Staff did not always intervene sufficiently to extend children's play activities or to develop their skills. In the primary classes, almost all pupils were well-behaved, motivated to learn, and interacted well together. Staff had worked successfully to establish a positive learning environment. Pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to work independently or collaboratively in groups. At all stages, pupils produced good quality art work. Pupils in the P5-7

Gaelic-medium class worked well to produce interesting models in a technology lesson. Pupils at P7 were developing confidence in inventing tunes in music. At all stages, in too many lessons, the pace of learning was too slow.

Children in the nursery classes were happy and settled. Staff successfully encouraged the development of children's early social skills. In the primary classes, staff had taken effective steps to develop pupils' wider achievements. At all stages, most pupils had made good progress in developing their confidence and self-esteem. They were effectively involved in making decisions in the school. They contributed effectively to the school by being part of committees, such as the Eco School committee, the School's Nutrition Action Group and pupil council. Pupils at the upper stages enjoyed developing good citizenship skills by being buddies to younger pupils. Pupils at P7 contributed well to the community by organising events to raise money for a cancer charity. Across the stages, pupils had developed skills of teamwork by performing to audiences through music and drama. They enjoyed and benefited socially from many opportunities to contribute to events in the community, for example, P3 taking part in St Duthac Day celebrations in the local church along with another local primary school. A significant number of pupils in the Gaelic classes competed successfully at the national Mòd.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in communication and language. They listened well to instructions and talked with confidence to adults and each other. They enjoyed story time and listened attentively. Staff did not always encourage children to predict what might happen next or develop their ideas sufficiently. Across the primary classes, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. In recent years standards of attainment in reading had been consistently good and had steadily improved in writing. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Across the stages, a significant number of pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Most pupils had developed good skills in talking and listening and were confident in a range of different situations. Across the stages, most pupils were fluent readers and were keen to read for pleasure. At P7, pupils demonstrated effective skills in analysing written texts. At all stages, pupils were developing a sound knowledge of language and produced good quality writing in a range of styles. Pupils' skills in writing at length were not sufficiently well developed. Across the stages, pupils presented written work neatly.

Gaelic language

In the Gaelic nursery, children were making very good progress in learning the Gaelic language. They listened well to instructions and stories and were developing confidence in speaking to adults. Children developed social skills by playing imaginatively and by taking turns to play a matching game. In the primary Gaelic-medium classes, the overall quality of attainment in Gaelic language was very good. Almost all pupils achieved national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. They were making very good progress with their coursework. At all stages, almost all pupils were making very positive progress in the acquisition of the Gaelic language. Almost all pupils listened attentively to their teachers' instructions and responded appropriately. Almost all pupils spoke confidently and used

Gaelic very well in discussion with their teachers and each other. They read fluently and with understanding. By P7, pupils were able to talk in depth and give opinions on their favourite books and authors. Pupils performed well in small group discussions. At the early stages, pupils were making a good start in writing stories. At the middle and upper stages, pupils wrote effectively for a range of purposes.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery classes were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. Most could identify simple colours and patterns. They used a range of puzzles and computer games to match and sort. Children's skills in counting, investigating and solving simple mathematical problems were not yet well developed. In the primary classes, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Almost all pupils at the early stages, and most at the middle and upper stages, were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. A significant number of pupils attained these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Standards of attainment had improved in recent years. Across the stages, pupils could interpret accurately information from appropriate graphs and charts. Their skills in using ICT to organise and present information using spreadsheets and databases were not well developed. Pupils at P1 were making effective progress in learning early number skills. At all stages, pupils were developing appropriate skills in mental calculation. At P7, pupils demonstrated effective skills in working with units of measurement. At the middle stages, pupils had a sound understanding of two- and three-dimensional shapes. At the upper stages, pupils showed appropriate knowledge of coordinates. Across the stages, pupils had successfully developed appropriate strategies in problem solving.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Arrangements for meeting children's and pupils' learning needs were good overall. Staff in the nursery classes supported children well and were sensitive and responsive to the needs of individuals. They assessed children's progress regularly but did not always use this information to focus sufficiently on children's learning needs. Staff did not always organise groups and activities to provide effective challenge for all. In the primary classes, teachers set tasks and activities which were well matched to the needs of individual pupils in most classes. Staff did not always set challenging tasks for more able pupils and pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to learn independently. There were effective procedures for identifying pupils requiring additional help with their learning. Support staff gave helpful support to individual pupils and groups of pupils. Staff worked well in partnership with a range of support agencies to assist pupils with additional support needs. Pupils were well supported in transferring from pre-school to P1 and from P7 to Tain Royal Academy through, for example, the effective links developed by the Children's Services Worker.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>In the nursery classes, staff provided a very safe and welcoming environment for learning. At the primary stages, staff had very good arrangements for pastoral care. These included appropriate procedures for action against bullying, administration of medicines and safe use of the Internet. All staff had undertaken appropriate training in child protection. Pupils were confident that staff would deal effectively with any incidents of bullying. Pupils had a range of appropriate ways of informing staff of any concerns. They were knowledgeable about keeping healthy and benefited from taking part in a wide range of after-school clubs which promoted physical activity. Pupils at P7 provided helpful support to pupils entering P1. Parents had been kept well informed about how sensitive health issues were taught.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. There were appropriate security arrangements in place for access to the nurseries and school buildings. Teaching areas were too small and restricted some pupils' activities. Access for users and visitors with restricted mobility was limited. Storage space was insufficient. The school hall was of a reasonable size and was in almost constant use for PE, drama and school assemblies. Many windows did not open properly and were in a poor state of repair. In some areas, heating was difficult to control. The demountable buildings provided spacious classrooms but required redecoration.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Staff had created a very welcoming environment for pupils, parents and visitors. Relationships between staff and pupils were very good and almost all pupils were polite and friendly. Pupils had a very strong sense of pride in the school and had appropriate opportunities to be involved in making decisions. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attendance. Teachers' expectations for pupils' attainment were not consistently high enough. The school successfully celebrated pupils' school and wider achievements at assemblies, special awards and through displays. All pupils had an achievement folder which was used very successfully to record a wide range of their achievements. There were appropriately frequent opportunities for religious observance. The school had an appropriate policy for racial equality and pupils were treated fairly in school. The school did not consistently promote diversity and equality issues through the curriculum.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The school had developed excellent links with parents and the community. Parents and members of the community made a significant contribution to pupils' learning by, for example, helping in classes, on trips and with clubs. A small group of parents provided helpful administrative support and assisted in the library. Parents and other members of the community worked well with staff and pupils in the various school committees and action groups, including the active Parent Council and PTA. The headteacher produced regular and informative newsletters and met frequently with parents. He had provided very helpful advice for parents on various ways in which they could help with their children's learning. For example, the headteacher, assisted by pupils, demonstrated effective story-telling skills for parents. School reports were clear and provided helpful advice. The school had developed sound links with community organisations and businesses who regularly visited the school and contributed to pupils' learning. School performances and events were very well supported by parents and the local community. The school had developed very effective links with local nurseries and schools. Pupils benefited from positive curricular links with Tain Royal Academy. For example, pupils at P7 transferring to S1 developed a range of skills through an effective problem solving activity day.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Overall, the quality of education provided by Craighill Primary School had many strengths. The school, led by the very caring and enthusiastic headteacher, provided a welcoming and supportive environment in which almost all pupils were well behaved. Parents provided very good support for the school. Pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics was good, and, in the Gaelic-medium classes, very good in Gaelic language. The quality of teaching was good overall but was not maintained consistently across all classes. Teachers were committed to the school and worked well with senior managers and the wide range of support staff. Staff had not yet ensured the consistent development of pupils' skills in learning independently and in collaborating with each other.

The experienced headteacher provided very effective leadership. He had gained the respect and confidence of parents, pupils and staff. He showed a very strong commitment to pupils' education and well-being. The headteacher demonstrated a high level of professional competence and staff appreciated his enthusiasm and support. He had improved several aspects of the school's work, for example, by successfully involving parents in school life and in recording and celebrating pupils' achievements. The headteacher and his two deputy headteachers formed an effective senior management team. The deputy headteachers fulfilled their appropriate remits well and had led some successful initiatives including the school's buddy scheme and pupil council. They worked well with the headteacher to monitor and evaluate the work of the school using a wide range of approaches. The senior management team worked effectively with teachers to systematically track the progress of pupils and to set learning targets for them in reading, writing and mathematics. They met regularly with teachers to discuss pupils' progress. The headteacher and deputy headteachers formally visited lessons and gave teachers some helpful feedback for improvements. These arrangements were not sufficiently rigorous and had yet to result in sustained and consistent improvements in learning and teaching. Senior managers worked with staff to evaluate the school's work and had identified a number of appropriate priorities for improvement. The headteacher, with the support of his deputy headteachers and the education authority, had the capacity to make continued improvements.

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 classes there was one requirement. This had been addressed satisfactorily.

Main points for action

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

- provide more opportunities for pupils to be independent, active learners;
- develop more systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating classroom practice to ensure consistently effective teaching and learning across the school; and
- ensure that pupils develop more systematically and consistently, across the school, their skills in using information and communications technology.

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

18 March 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?	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in Gaelic language	very 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	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	excellent

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
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"> • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • The school had explained how parents could help children with homework. • Their children were treated fairly in the school. • The school was good at consulting parents on decisions affecting their children. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost a fifth of parents felt that school buildings had not been kept in good order.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers told them when they had done something well. • Teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability. • The school helped them to keep themselves safe and healthy. • If they were upset, the school was good at helping to sort things out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quarter 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"> • The school was well led. • Pupils' success was regularly celebrated. • They liked working in the school. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few non-teaching staff wanted to be more involved in decision-making processes.

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.

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