

**Acharacle Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Highland Council
20 May 2008**

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1. Background

Acharacle Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in February 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 a group of parents¹.

The school serves the village of Acharacle and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 72 pupils, including 16 children in the nursery classes. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above 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.

- Attention to the care, welfare and development of pupils.
- Success in involving parents in the life of the school
- Pupils' confidence and involvement in learning.
- Innovative use of information and communications technology (ICT) in pupils' learning.

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?

Overall, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the work of the school. Parents in the nursery were very positive about the quality of care and education provided for their children. A small number of parents stated that they would like more information on their children's progress and the work of the nursery. In the primary classes, all parents felt that there was mutual respect between pupils and teachers and all thought that their children were happy at school. Almost all pupils were satisfied with all aspects of the school. They thought teachers knew them well and helped them with their work. Staff expressed a high degree of satisfaction with all aspects of the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

In the nursery classes, the curriculum was broad and balanced and children had access to an appropriate variety of activities and experiences. Nursery staff planned appropriately for key aspects of children's development and learning. The quality of the curriculum in the primary classes was good. The curriculum was appropriately broad but the programme for English language required more attention to be given to improving children's writing. Staff gave pupils insufficient opportunities to learn through play in the early stages classes. The interactive whiteboard was used appropriately to support learning in the infant classes. Flexibility time was used by teachers to respond to pupils' interests but the school needed to do more to monitor the impact of additional time allocated to specific aspects of learning. Visits to local churches were effectively linked to the religious and moral education curriculum. Transition from nursery to P1 was enhanced by the P1 teacher and pupils joining the nursery once weekly. The school had achieved Health Promoting School status. Staff ensured all pupils experienced two hours of physical education (PE) each week, in line with national recommendations. The quality of teaching was good. Teachers actively sought contexts for mathematics development at P5-P7 which had a positive impact on pupils' mathematical understanding. Teachers effectively shared learning intentions and success criteria with pupils. Pupils were encouraged to reflect on their own learning and to share these reflections with parents. Staff effectively developed pupils' skills in using ICT. For example, pupils in the P5-P7 class had created imaginative presentations using graphics and text. They had also developed well constructed pod casts and devised effective animations using computers. Staff used ICT well to support homework for a few pupils.

Pupils' learning was good overall. In the nursery classes children were happy and motivated. They learned well through a range of well planned activities, including the library, writing, a café role play, science, ICT and painting. In the primary classes, pupils were keen to be involved in learning and concentrated well on tasks set for them. Those at the middle and upper stages had successfully undertaken a potato growing project. Active steps were being taken by staff and pupils to involve others in the local and wider community to support pupils' learning. Pupils were not confident in discussing next steps in their learning. Teachers did not consistently offer higher attaining pupils sufficient challenge in the tasks set for them.

The school successfully helped pupils to develop their wider achievements and this contributed to the confidence of the pupils. Pupils were actively involved in the Pupil Council and the eco committee. Pupils responded well to the Community Stars programme, which gave an effective focus for celebration of good behaviour, attainment and achievements. Pupils had experienced success in local and national Mods. They had learned skills in listening and talking through engaging in interviews on a Gaelic children's radio programme. At P5-P7, pupils had improved their citizenship skills through a helpful visit to the Scottish Parliament. All pupils had been effectively involved in successful school shows and concerts. Those at P5-P7 from both English and Gaelic medium classes took part in a successful computer based link up to discuss questions linked to their topic work on Europe.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in communication and language. They were confident when talking to adults and to each other. Children were interested in books and the written word and they listened well to stories. Nursery children were beginning to be able to write their own name and they all recognised their own names. In the primary classes, the overall quality of attainment in English language was adequate. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. Some pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress in their learning. Most pupils listened well to instructions and spoke confidently with the teacher and other adults. A few were not skilled at listening to others. Pupils' skills in group discussion were insufficiently developed at all stages. Most pupils read with fluency and expression. At P6 and P7, pupils talked confidently about features of the books they had read. Across the school pupils read extensively for pleasure. Pupils wrote for a range of purposes and in a number of styles but this was not consistently of a high standard. Pupils' skills in writing at length were not sufficiently developed. Pupils had insufficient opportunities to engage in extended writing and progress in writing was not consistently good across the school.

Gaelic language

In the Gaelic nursery, children were making good progress in learning Gaelic. They listened carefully to staff, showing understanding of what was being said. Children developed social skills by playing imaginatively and by taking turns at games. They enjoyed singing songs and listening to music. They were successfully developing their early writing skills. In the primary classes, the overall quality of attainment in Gaelic language was good. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. At all stages, pupils listened attentively and responded appropriately. Most pupils were making good progress with their class work, and were developing effective oral skills in Gaelic. Pupils at the early stages were developing good skills in group discussion. They collaborated well in pairs but by P7, pupils were less secure in group discussions. At the early stages, most pupils were making good progress in developing their reading skills in Gaelic. Those at P6 and P7 read fluently and with understanding. Pupils at P2-P4 were developing effective skills in writing. In the upper stages, pupils were writing well for an increasing range of purposes.

Mathematics

Children in the Gaelic medium and English medium nursery classes were making good progress in early mathematics. Children could count to 3 and were beginning to recognise numbers. Children, however, were insufficiently challenged in dealing with mathematical problems. In the primary classes, the quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Across the school, almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. A minority of pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils at P1 and P2 were making good progress in learning aspects of mathematics through play. Upper primary classes were making good progress in dealing with mathematics in a range of contexts linked to other curricular areas, for example, problem solving in physical education and in environmental studies. Problem solving and enquiry could be further developed at other stages of the school. Pupils at all stages organised information well and displayed their findings appropriately. Most pupils were confident and accurate in written and mental calculations. Those at the upper stages were less secure when working with decimals, percentages and fractions. Pupils across the school were confident in calculations involving money. At P5-P7, pupils could describe the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes and had an appropriate understanding of angles and coordinates.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

In the nursery classes, staff knew children well and were sensitive to their needs. Children were happy and motivated and learned well in all contexts. Staff were aware of children's needs and worked effectively with the learning support teacher. Nursery staff offered good support to children and their families. In the primary classes, teachers made adequate provision for meeting learners' needs. Teachers differentiated tasks and classroom assistants were deployed appropriately to support teachers and pupils. Staff, however, did not consistently challenge higher attaining pupils in all classes. There were appropriate arrangements for the transition of pupils from the nursery classes to P1. Transition arrangements from P7 to S1 were satisfactory and included a day visit to an Outward Bound Centre. Effective individualised educational programmes, which had been shared with parents and pupils, were in place to assist teachers in planning appropriate support for pupils with additional support needs. The support for learning teacher was deployed appropriately to provide additional support. An effective programme of staged intervention had recently been put in place to identify and assist pupils with additional support needs.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>Very good arrangements were in place for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils. In the nursery classes, all staff were trained in child protection routines and knew the children well. Children were happy and confident with the routines and had developed friendships. All nursery and primary staff had received training in child protection and were confident in their knowledge of how to respond to any issues relating to pupil welfare. At the primary stages, pupils were encouraged to discuss any concerns they might have by means of an effective system introduced by the headteacher. Pupils felt staff knew them well and that they were safe and well looked after. Playground buddies and monitors were used effectively to support younger pupils.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The quality of the school accommodation was unsatisfactory. The education authority had begun work to build a replacement school. Building work was in progress at the time of the inspection giving rise to some access restrictions. Playground space was also severely restricted. An appropriate security system was in place with a signing in book. Disabled access into the school was limited to one ramp into one area of the school. There was no quiet area in which pupils could engage with the learning support teacher. The school was bright and clean inside but floor coverings were in a poor state of repair. The existing buildings gave staff and pupils too little space for organising and managing resources. The headteacher and school secretary had to share space in an area used for a wide range of purposes, including school lunches and music tuition. There was no space for private interviews. Provision for PE was in the local village hall.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	<p>In the nursery classes, staff-child relationships were very good. Staff encouraged and praised children well and there were warm relationships throughout both nursery classes. Across the primary classes, relationships between staff and pupils were good. The poor behaviour of a few pupils on occasion disrupted the learning of others. Staff encouraged pupils to participate in a wide range of activities and this contributed to an ethos of achievement. Pupils, parents and Ranger Service staff, effectively worked together on the eco committee. The headteacher had prioritised the development of a school policy on religious observance and had arranged for a range of contributors to support appropriate regular religious observance. The headteacher had appointed an equality coordinator which had a positive impact on pupils' awareness of equality issues. The school was in the process of implementing the Council's new strategy on racial equality. Across the school staff needed to ensure that they have consistently high expectations of pupils' attainment.</p>
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	<p>School staff had successfully involved parents and the wider community in the work of the school. Parents felt welcome in the school and in the nursery classes. They found the staff friendly, helpful and supportive. Parents felt listened to and thought that their children were well looked after. There was no evidence of bullying in the school. There were regular newsletters and parents evenings. Parents received an annual detailed progress report. The headteacher had introduced alternative arrangements for parents to arrange to meet with her outwith the school day. The school had been successful in involving parents in a range of helpful activities. These included parent-run activities on Friday afternoons, a Credit Union with active pupil involvement and a healthy tuck shop. The school had appropriate arrangements in place for keeping parents informed of all sensitive health issues.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Acharacle Primary School and nursery class provided a caring environment for learning. The quality of teaching and of pupils' learning experiences was good. The headteacher and staff, working with the support of the education authority, had the clear capacity to improve the school.

The headteacher had been in post for just over one year at the time of the inspection and provided good leadership to the school. She had built positive relationships with nursery staff and worked in nursery along with staff and children. She had made good arrangements for P1 teachers to work in nursery. She has set an appropriate agenda for improvement based on a clear vision for the school and the nursery. She shares this vision with staff in the nursery and primary who had responded well. The headteacher had effectively involved staff throughout the school in aspects of policy development. Under her leadership an appropriate start had been made to a programme of self-evaluation. This included classroom observations by the headteacher and observations by teachers of each others' classroom practices. This programme had not yet had significant impact in improving aspects of learning and teaching. The headteacher was ensuring an appropriate focus on learning, for example, through the prioritisation of a support for learning policy and regular discussion on teaching and learning with staff. There was evidence that this was having an impact on classroom provision but there remained headroom for improvement. As a priority, the staff now needs to improve pupils' attainment in writing.

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

Main points for action

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

- attainment in English language;
- meeting the learning needs of higher achieving pupils, and
- the effectiveness of the arrangements for self-evaluation in improving learning, teaching and 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.

Frank Adams
Managing Inspector

20 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	adequate
Improvement in performance: mathematics	good
Improvement in performance: Gaelic language	good

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

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

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	adequate

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">• Kept parents informed about their children's strengths and weaknesses.• Set high standards for pupil's attainment.• Welcomed parents into the school.• Consulted parents on decisions affecting their children.• Dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They enjoyed being at school.• Teachers explained things clearly.• Pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better.• Helped them to feel safe and looked after.• Let pupils know how to improve their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the behaviour of some pupils.

Appendix 3 Good practice

In the course of the inspection, the following aspect of innovative and effective practice was evaluated as being worthy of wider dissemination.

Use of ICT in Acharacle Primary School

Staff were keen to find ways of engaging pupils in multi-stage composite classes and across a range of curricular areas in such a way that they could work collaboratively despite age and stage differences.

The school set out to investigate and employ a range of hardware, software and web-based applications to enhance classroom learning. Pupils contributed to a range of blogs; from “The New School Build” to our World Book Day parent child collaborative writing project. Every child had the opportunity to achieve success by contributing a piece of extended writing on a blog or recording their thoughts onto MP3. Podcasting was used allowing collaboration in talking and listening and experience of editing sound files. Less-confident writers and pupils with additional support needs expressed their ideas in a medium other than the written word. Skype was used to work on videoconferencing with the BBC’s ‘Eorpa’ programme. This technology was also planned to be used to collaborate across classes - either Gaelic/English projects or infant/upper work.

Pupils have learned to communicate effectively in a variety of ways which will allow them to participate more fully in 21st Century life. They problem solve and can access help from each other or from online help functions. They have learned about copyright through sourcing "royalty free" music for their work and are becoming aware of the need to keep safe online. Confident writers can still write in a variety of formats whilst less confident pupils can still see results using photo-blogging or podcasts which allows them to make this work publicly available.

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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