

**Ballachulish Primary School
The Highland Council
30 August 2005**

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1. Background

Ballachulish Primary School was inspected in April 2005 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association, and a group of parents.

The school serves the village of Ballachulish and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 81, including 32 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT) at all stages.
- The dedication and commitment of staff and their positive and productive relationships established with pupils.
- The support of parents, the School Board and the wider community.
- Visits, the contribution of visitors to lessons and opportunities for pupils to achieve beyond the formal curriculum.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, 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.

Parents and carers, pupils and staff were very positive about the school. In particular, parents spoke highly about the headteacher and praised the approachability of the staff. About a quarter of parents felt that the school buildings were not kept in good order. Around a third of pupils felt that the behaviour of other pupils was not good. Most pupils indicated that they enjoyed school and knew what to do if they were upset. In interview

pupils were forthright and unanimous in their praise of the school. All staff thoroughly enjoyed working in the school and felt that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided a good curriculum. Pupils had very good opportunities to use their ICT skills across the curriculum to access information and create databases. Music, physical education, health education and religious and moral education received appropriate attention. Pupils' experiences were enhanced by additional tuition in fiddle music and the tin whistle. In many lessons good clear questioning helped to reinforce and extend learning. Teachers' explanations were almost always detailed and easy to follow. There were numerous instances of direct teaching linked to positive encouragement. All staff valued pupils' responses, but did not always provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to work in groups. Teachers met pupils' needs well through providing a range of varied tasks. They used homework effectively to supplement class learning and challenge pupils.

At all stages, teachers made very good use of ICT to stimulate and enhance pupils' learning. Almost all pupils were enthusiastic and well-motivated. In several lessons pupils were encouraged to think for themselves and, as a result, produced innovative solutions to problems. In most lessons, pupils worked quietly and purposefully and listened carefully to teachers' explanations and instructions. In a few classes, for a few pupils, the pace of work was too slow.

Pupils participated in a good range of visits to places of historical and educational interest including local churches and the Glencoe Outdoor Centre. Pupils enthusiastically participated in the school's drama club in rehearsing for a public performance. At all stages, pupils ran successful enterprise activities, including the school tuck-shop and growing and selling plants. Membership of the pupil forum, posts of responsibility as buddies, junior road safety officers and house captains all helped pupils develop mature and responsible attitudes. Inter-house competitions were keenly contested and the school's system of rewards for good work effectively motivated pupils.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Standards in reading and writing had remained high over the last three years. Many pupils at all stages were exceeding national expectations of attainment. Most pupils entering P3 had attained appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and all had done so in writing. Pupils in P1-P3 made good progress in developing skills in listening and talking. At P4 to P7 most attained these levels in reading, listening and talking and almost all in writing. Most pupils listened attentively in class and responded at length to teachers' questions. At all stages, pupils showed very good skill in using ICT to find information. Most pupils were skilled in reading for information. They had a good appreciation of how authors used particular words for effect. From P2 onwards, pupils wrote for a good range of purposes, including accounts of visits to local churches. At

P4, pupils produced very good quality reports of their researches into the history of the Vikings. By P7, pupils' knowledge about language was well developed, but was not always reflected in the quality of their written pieces.

Mathematics

In mathematics the overall quality of attainment was good. Attainment had been steady in recent years. Most pupils attained, and at the early stages almost all exceeded, appropriate national levels for their stage. Most pupils performed well in their classwork, but for a few pupils the pace slowed as they progressed through the school. Pupils demonstrated good skills in interpreting graphs and charts. From the early stages onwards almost all pupils made good use of computers to create a range of graphs. At all stages, most performed written and mental calculations well. At the middle stages they were confident when handling money and working with time. At P7, pupils had a good understanding of angles and the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes, but were less secure when working with fractions and percentages. While pupils had regular opportunities to undertake problem solving tasks they were not sufficiently aware of the strategies they could use to solve problems.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school had very effective arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils. All staff, including support staff, had a strong commitment to ensuring pupils' well being. They knew pupils and their families well and were sensitive and responsive to their individual circumstances. There were appropriate procedures in place to deal with child protection, bullying and incidents involving health and safety. Staff effectively promoted healthy lifestyles and pupils understood the importance of diet and exercise. Pupils had a clear understanding of what to do if they had concerns about matters such as their personal safety. The school provided very good support for looked after children and those from traveller families.

Class teachers worked closely with the support for learning teacher and the Travellers' Support Teacher to address the varying needs of a range of pupils. Pupils who were experiencing difficulties in learning were well supported as individuals or in small groups. These pupils made good progress. However, some higher attaining pupils in the middle and upper stages required further challenge to enable them to progress more quickly. The school had begun to help pupils set personal learning targets, which they used to help them improve their work. There were effective arrangements for the transfer of pupils to P1 from the nursery and from P7 to secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of the accommodation and facilities was good. The exterior of the building was well-maintained. The security system was appropriate. Corridors and classrooms were in need of redecoration. There was very good provision of ICT equipment, but a number of library books and English language resources were in poor condition and out-of-date. Parts of the outdoor play areas were rough and uneven and were, on occasion, subject to fouling by sheep, which presented a potential health hazard. There were important weaknesses in the arrangements for managing pedestrian and vehicular access to the school. Vehicles drove into the school playground while pupils were entering and leaving, using the same gate as pupils. These arrangements presented a potentially serious safety hazard.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>All members of the school community, given a strong lead by the headteacher, were fully committed to including all pupils in the work of the school. Diversity was widely celebrated and respect for difference effectively promoted in line with the school's racial equality policy. Relationships at all levels were very good. There were very good arrangements to consult with and involve pupils in improving the school. Pupil and staff morale was high. Staff and pupils had high expectations for behaviour, courtesy and good discipline, but should expect high attainment more consistently in the middle and upper stages. Reception of visitors was well organised and welcoming. Staff provided extensive opportunities for pupils to achieve outwith the formal curriculum and successes were well recognised and celebrated. There were regular opportunities for pupils to take part in religious observance.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had very strong links with parents, the local community and the School Board. The School Board was regularly consulted on aspects of the school's work. The school had established very good and productive contacts with a wide range of other agencies which ensured effective support for pupils and their families. Parents regularly helped with a range of activities to support the school. Regular well-designed and informative newsletters and a range of briefing notes kept parents and carers up-to-date</p>

Partnership with parents and the community	with school events and the school's priorities for improvement. The school provided good advice on homework and how parents could help their children's learning. Written reports to parents and carers gave clear progress reports and sound advice on the next steps needed in children's learning. The school consulted parents regularly on potentially sensitive aspects of its health education programme.
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7. Improving the school

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

Ballachulish Primary School provided a happy and secure environment in which all pupils were valued and respected. Pupils attained good standards in English language and mathematics, often exceeding national expectations. However, a number of higher attaining pupils could have achieved more, particularly in the upper stages. The range of extra-curricular and enterprise activities contributed significantly to pupils' personal and social development.

The headteacher provided good leadership. He was very committed to the school and its community and had served both for many years. He had effectively ensured that all pupils' learning was enhanced through the use of ICT. He had been very successful in developing an inclusive school and ensuring effective partnership working with support agency personnel. He had very good relationships with, and was very well respected by staff, pupils and parents. He had ensured strong teamwork amongst staff and had involved them extensively in policy development. He now needed to strengthen the emphasis on raising pupils' attainments and ensure that the needs of higher attaining pupils were fully met. Overall arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school were good. Parents and pupils were regularly consulted on how to improve the school's provision. The headteacher visited classes on a regular basis to monitor learning and teaching and sample pupils' work. He should now provide staff with more detailed feedback on his observations in order to effect improvement and ensure consistency across the school. All staff had had their work reviewed as part of the education authority's programme of staff development and review. The system for tracking and predicting pupils' progress was effective. The school had identified appropriate priorities for improvement including improving reading, and was systematically implementing these. Ballachulish Primary School was well placed to continue to improve.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to ensure that pupils' learning needs, are fully met. In so doing they should:

- improve the pace of learning in mathematics in the middle and upper stages;
- extend/improve the range and quality of resources for pupils' reading and language development; and
- attend to the health and safety aspects identified in this report.

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

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector

30 August 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Accommodation and facilities
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be fair

- No aspects were found to be in this category

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

<p>What pleased parents and carers most</p>	<p>What parents and carers would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful and informative reports and parents' evenings. • The welcome they received in the school. • The school's reputation in the community. • Advice on how they could help with homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian and vehicular access to the school.
<p>What pleased pupils most</p>	<p>What pupils would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of extra-curricular activities. • Approachable and sympathetic teachers. • Being kept safe and healthy. • Teachers checking their homework and the system for rewarding good work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of some pupils.
<p>What pleased staff most</p>	<p>What staff would like to see improved</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The working atmosphere in the school. • The concern shown for pupils. • Mutual respect between staff and pupils. • Their involvement in decision making. • The leadership of the headteacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff had no significant concerns.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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