

**Banavie Primary School
and nursery class
by Fort William
The Highland Council
2 October 2007**

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1. Background

Banavie Primary School and nursery class were inspected in June 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 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 School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents¹.

The school serves a rural area to the west of Fort William. At the time of the inspection the roll was 137, including nine children in the nursery class. The school had a special class for a small group of primary age pupils who almost all came from outwith the school's catchment area. These pupils had additional support needs arising from severe and complex learning difficulties. In the school as a whole, 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.

- Inclusion of all members of the school community in the life of the school.
- Attainment in reading.
- Pupils' behaviour and positive attitude to learning.
- Staff's care for the pupils and nursery children.

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, including those with children in the nursery and in the special class, were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. They felt that teachers encouraged their

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

children to work to the best of their ability, and helped parents to support their children's work at home. They found the school welcoming. Pupils were very positive about almost all aspects of the school, and felt safe and well looked after. They appreciated the way teachers set high standards for work and supported pupils when necessary. Staff were very pleased with all aspects of the school, including the leadership of the headteacher.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was broad and balanced and of good quality. Nursery staff provided children with a good curriculum and stimulating play experiences. However, the balance and structure of the day did not always provide nursery children with sufficient opportunities to engage in free play experiences. Nursery children had too few opportunities for challenging physical development. At the primary stages, staff allocated flexible time mainly to mathematics, language and expressive arts work as appropriate, and this was effective overall in raising pupils' achievements. Teachers often integrated well language skills across other parts of the curriculum, including environmental studies topics. Pupils benefited from high quality enterprise activities at all stages. A specialist teacher made a valuable contribution to the provision of two hours of physical education in each week for all pupils at the upper stages. Another specialist made a positive contribution to the development of pupils' skills in technology, and in information and communications technology (ICT), at the upper stages. Pupils' ICT skills were well developed through the school. There were weaknesses in the way staff developed pupils' skills in writing. The overall quality of teaching varied from very good to weak, and was adequate overall. Teachers explained ideas well. They interacted effectively with pupils during lessons, and maintained positive relationships with them. Teachers questioned pupils well to check their understanding. In a few lessons, teachers used imaginative approaches that engaged pupils well with their learning. Overall, teaching approaches lacked variety. Teachers did not give pupils enough feedback on what they needed to do to improve.

Children in the nursery confidently made choices and decisions about learning activities. They were finding out about the local environment through walks and visits to shops. They were beginning to explore scientific ideas about solids and liquids through simple experiments. Children were developing a knowledge and appreciation of music through singing, and using percussion instruments. They used a range of art and craft materials to explore painting and model-making. Their physical development, including ball skills, was progressing well through regular opportunities for play. However, this was limited by weaknesses in accommodation. The overall quality of learning was good. Pupils were almost always well-behaved and hardworking. They were mostly enthusiastic about their learning and worked very effectively together on tasks from the nursery onwards, particularly during enterprise projects. Pupils in P5 and P6 had very successfully collaborated to design and market T-shirts for the 'Ten under the Ben' mountain bike event. Teachers successfully encouraged pupils to carry out independent research during science projects, including those on invertebrates and the solar system. In most classes pupils were encouraged to think independently.

Pupils did not have enough opportunities to learn through play and were not given enough responsibility for their learning.

School staff had successful approaches to promoting pupils' wider achievement. They used the local environment well to promote pupils' skills in sports such as mountain biking and skiing. Pupils' participation in shinty and football was highly successful in developing their team-working skills and physical abilities. Pupils enjoyed much individual and team success in shinty. They also benefited from a range of after-school clubs, including dance and Gaelic singing. These activities, developing from early music experiences in the nursery, contributed to the school's successes at the Lochaber Music Festival. Other activities linked to the Highland Year of Culture, such as those promoted by the author and artist in residence, also effectively supported pupils' developments in the expressive arts. Older pupils had a valuable range of responsibilities around the school, including acting as buddies for children from the nursery and P1 pupils. The pupil council had successfully raised the environmental awareness of staff and pupils, through the promotion of recycling. Children in the nursery were developing an early awareness of the need to recycle. At P7, pupils had used their problem solving skills to improve dining hall arrangements. The school did not yet systematically track pupils' wider achievement and personal development.

English language

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in communication and language. They were developing early skills in word recognition and writing, and in listening and talking. Most children in the nursery listened well to adults reading stories, and spoke confidently about their own experiences. The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Almost all pupils in the school were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading. Most achieved these levels in talking, listening and writing. Across the school, the majority were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Most pupils who were not attaining national levels were making good progress in their learning. In recent years pupils' attainment in reading had improved. Attainment in writing had remained steady. Pupils were articulate, confident speakers. Most pupils listened attentively to adults and responded well to instructions. Pupils were less skilled when listening and talking to each other in groups. Across the school almost all pupils were making very good progress in reading. By the upper stages, they read fluently and accurately. Pupils in the upper stages could identify their favourite author and discuss aspects of books they had read including plot, characters and setting. They were developing an awareness of the language and structure of poetry. At all stages, pupils wrote well for a range of purposes. They produced interesting pieces of writing often linked to other curricular areas such as environmental studies projects. Their skills in writing at greater length were not well developed. The quality of the presentation of pupils' writing was not consistently high.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their understanding of early numeracy. Most could accurately count above ten. They used practical equipment and real life materials confidently in situations involving weighing, using money, and time. They could name colours, and recognise simple shapes. The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Almost all pupils at the early primary stages, and

most at the middle and upper stages, were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. Almost all at the early stages, and a third at the upper stages, exceeded these levels. In recent years, the overall levels of attainment had been increasing steadily, but had fallen significantly in 2007. Most pupils who were not attaining national levels were making good progress in their learning. Throughout the school, pupils could accurately interpret an appropriate range of graphs. They had used computers effectively to organise and display information, and had carried out simple surveys. Pupils could accurately carry out written calculations in a variety of situations, including those involving money and measurement. Most pupils from P5 could carry out mental calculations quickly and accurately. However, at P1 to P4, pupils' skills in mental calculation were less well developed. At all stages, pupils showed a good understanding of the names and properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Their skills in problem solving developed very well as pupils moved up through the school.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Overall, the way the school met pupils' learning needs was adequate. Staff in the nursery met pupils' learning needs very well. In the nursery, teachers planned pupils' next steps in their learning very effectively. In primary classes, teachers and learning assistants supported pupils' learning well. From P1, staff too often did not target their teaching well enough to challenge higher attaining pupils. The school had sound arrangements to identify any pupils who needed significant additional support for their learning. A few pupils had individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Pupils were involved in setting learning targets within these. Parents and pupils were well involved in reviewing progress made. The targets in IEPs did not take enough account of pupils' prior learning in order to ensure that they made good progress in their learning. The two support for learning teachers were not involved enough in advising staff on teaching approaches or in adapting learning and teaching materials.

Special Class

The teacher, learning support assistants and visiting teachers supported pupils in the special class well. They met pupils' physical and emotional needs very well. Pupils were included wherever possible in the life of the school, both for learning and for socialising. They made a positive contribution to the school community, such as during enterprise projects. All pupils had appropriate long-term learning targets set within their IEPs. Short-term targets were not precise enough to ensure that pupils made appropriate progress in their learning. While a few pupils were making very good progress in developing their verbal communication skills, staff needed to use a wider range of methods of promoting communication, including signs and symbols. Teachers effectively used a wide range of resources to support pupils' physical development and mobility. Staff successfully promoted pupils' personal and social development through a range of experiences, including swimming and visits to the multi-sensory room. A few pupils had well developed social skills and could express their feelings and preferences confidently. Whenever possible, pupils were given opportunities to engage in an increasingly independent way with their immediate environment and to make choices about their learning. Teachers did not make enough use of ICT, or of active learning contexts, to support pupils.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The school had very good approaches to promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils. They were very caring of all pupils, including those in the nursery and the special class. Staff were aware of how to apply child protection procedures. Pupils could report any concerns to a member of staff, to a playground buddy, or through the anti-bullying box. The school's health programme from the nursery onwards successfully informed pupils of the need for a healthy diet and lifestyle. Local police helped to inform pupils of the dangers of substance misuse. Pupils showed an awareness of how to stay safe online, and the dangers of giving out personal information when using the Internet. Transfer arrangements between the nursery and P1, and between P7 and Lochaber High School, were very effective.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of accommodation was adequate. The school was attractively situated in extensive grounds which were well used for sports and games. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' security and safety were appropriate. Persons with restricted mobility could access the building and most facilities easily. The outside play area for nursery children was too small. This limited their opportunities to take part in challenging energetic play. The room used by the special class was also too small to allow for some activities. Aspects of building maintenance, including roof leakage and rotting window frames, required to be addressed.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Climate and relationships in the school were very good. Pupils, parents and staff were very proud of the school. Relationships between all members of the school community were almost always very positive. The school consistently promoted pupils' achievements very well in class, at assemblies, and through displays round the school. Throughout the school, staff and pupils shared high expectations for standards of behaviour. From P1-P4, expectations for attainment were not as consistently high as in P5-P7. Overall, pupils were not sufficiently involved in monitoring their own progress and in managing their own learning. The school had very good procedures for ensuring and promoting equality and fairness. Staff took clear and effective steps to treat everyone fairly, though a few older pupils did not think so. There were very effective arrangements to include pupils from the special class in the life of the school. Staff implemented race equality procedures very well. The school successfully promoted awareness of the cultures and religions of other countries through assemblies and work in religious and moral education. Arrangements for religious observance were appropriate.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had a very good partnership with parents and the community. The school effectively assisted parents in supporting their children's learning, including the use of home-school diaries where appropriate. Newsletters and reports to parents on their children's progress were detailed and informative. The School Board and the PTA actively supported the school. They had raised funds to purchase sports equipment, and had worked to improve road safety outside the school. Links between the school and its nursery, and with Lochaber High School, were effective. Other agencies were well involved in supporting the school's work with those pupils who required additional support. Members of the community actively supported school events. The chaplains gave positive support to the life of the school, including assemblies. Links with local businesses were very valuable in assisting the school's enterprise work.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Banavie Primary School was performing well in many respects. Pupils had positive attitudes to their learning. They behaved very well, and this contributed to the very good relationships between all members of the school community. Some aspects of attainment were high, particularly in reading. The quality of teaching varied too widely across the school. There was much scope to raise standards of teaching, and so improve pupils' learning and attainment. The headteacher had consistently worked hard with staff to improve the quality of teaching, but with limited effect. While the school was likely to continue to perform well, it had not clearly shown that it had the capacity to make significant improvements.

The quality of leadership was good. The headteacher demonstrated a high degree of professional knowledge and had a clear vision for the future of the school. She had improved teachers' planning, and supported and challenged their classroom practice. The headteacher monitored teachers' work and was very well aware of their varying strengths and development needs. She had put an appropriate emphasis on monitoring pupils' attainment and progress. She had not yet fully involved staff in working together to address identified weaknesses in classroom practice. The principal teacher supported the headteacher very well, and had deputised effectively for her during her absence. She carried out her duties effectively, including acting as a mentor for the probationer teacher. The school's procedures to evaluate its performance were adequate. Staff took good account of parents' views. The headteacher monitored teachers' plans, and their classroom practice. These arrangements had been partially successful in raising standards. The system for tracking pupils' progress had many strengths, and had identified where weaknesses in attainment lay. These weaknesses had not yet been fully addressed. Staff as a whole were not reflective enough about their own practice and about how well they were performing.

Nursery staff were knowledgeable about the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice and their implications for the nursery. At the last Care Commission inspection there were two recommendations and no requirements. One of the recommendations regarding extending the outdoor play area had not been met.

Main points for action

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

- improve the balance and structure of the nursery curriculum;
- improve the quality of teaching;
- meet the learning needs of all pupils more fully; and
- ensure that all staff are fully involved in evaluating their own practice and the overall work of the school.

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.

Brian Stewart
HM Inspector

2 October 2007

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	adequate
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	good
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">• Parents were very positive about almost all aspects of the school.	<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">• Pupils were very positive about almost all aspects of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few pupils mentioned in their questionnaires that they felt that pupils were not always treated fairly.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff were very positive about all aspects of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.

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

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