

**Mallaig High School
The Highland Council
4 September 2007**

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1. Background

Mallaig High School was inspected in March 2007 as part of a national sample of secondary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the school's work at all stages.

HM Inspectors evaluated how well the school was raising achievement for all pupils, taking into account the extent to which pupils' learning needs were met by the curriculum and teaching. They also analysed pupils' attainment in national examinations (see Appendix 3), the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its overall effectiveness and capacity for improvement. Inspectors focused particularly on English, mathematics, chemistry and S1 science, and computing.

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

HM Inspectors observed teaching, learning and achievement in lessons and other contexts and examined pupils' work. They analysed responses to questionnaires¹ issued to a sample of parents² and pupils and to all staff. They interviewed groups of pupils, including representatives of pupil councils, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

Mallaig High School is a non-denominational school serving the communities of Mallaig, Morar, Arisaig, Lochailort and Knoydart, together with the islands of Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum. Pupils from Knoydart and the islands were boarded with local families. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 136. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was broadly in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Effective and innovative implementation of Standard Grade courses at S2/S3.
- The positive influence of outdoor education on pupils' independence and teamworking skills at S4 to S6.
- Aspects of pupil support, including provision for pupils with additional support needs, communication about pupils' needs, and the setting of personal fitness targets for pupils.

¹ See Appendix 2

² Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?

To evaluate how well the school was raising achievement for all, HM Inspectors considered the extent to which the learning needs of all pupils were met through the curriculum and teaching. They evaluated the effectiveness of the school in promoting the learning and personal development of all pupils in lessons and in other, broader contexts. They also considered the standards attained in specific aspects of learning.

Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum was adequate. In session 2004-2005, the school had moved the teaching of Standard Grade courses from S3/S4 to S2/S3. Commendably, this innovative step aimed to raise pupils' achievement, and to provide more courses at S4 to S6 by forming classes which included pupils from different year groups. The headteacher had fully consulted parents and staff in making these changes. The new curricular structure had raised pupils' achievement at S2 and S3. The school was just beginning to monitor the effects on achievement at later stages.

Particular features of the curriculum included the following.

- At S1, the development of pupils' core skills in communication and numeracy was enhanced through the effective use of information and communications technology (ICT).
- Curricular links with the associated primary schools were not yet sufficiently developed.
- The school provided a broad range of Standard Grade courses at S2/S3, with flexible arrangements to suit pupils' differing needs.
- At S4 to S6, the school provided a good range of vocational courses for pupils, including a Skills for Work course. Around half of pupils at these stages developed personal skills and physical fitness through outdoor education experiences. In a few subjects, choice was enhanced through the provision of distance learning courses.
- Some aspects of the curriculum were not timetabled effectively. At S1, pupils had contacts with too many different teachers each week. On some days, pupils at S4 to S6 spent too many periods studying the same subject, resulting in quite lengthy gaps before they returned to the subject.
- From S1 to S6, pupils had insufficient time to develop their learning in religious and moral education. Due to staffing difficulties, the school did not offer business education. Senior pupils had had little opportunity to develop skills in technical education in earlier years. The school had not yet made plans to ensure that the time spent by all pupils on physical education met national targets.
- The programmes for personal and social education (PSE) and careers education were not sufficiently well planned.

Teaching and meeting pupils' needs

The overall quality of teaching was good. Teachers gave pupils clear instructions and explanations. Only a minority of them shared the aims of lessons effectively with pupils. Most teachers used a variety of approaches which engaged pupils in different types of learning activities. Teachers' use of questioning was generally good and in some cases highly skilled. In the best cases it promoted understanding and extended pupils' learning. The majority of teachers used ICT effectively to enliven lessons. Praise was used well by most teachers and in a few cases it was sharply focused and highly motivating. Homework was used well to reinforce learning in the majority of subjects. Teachers generally provided effective oral feedback to pupils but were less consistent in providing written feedback. Too few teachers summarised learning effectively at the end of lessons.

Class teachers and classroom assistants knew pupils well. They gave effective individual support to most pupils to meet their learning needs and raise their achievement. In most cases, teachers provided appropriate tasks and resources. In some subjects pupils could choose from a range of activities. In art and design, for example, they could choose from an exceptionally wide range of media. Coursework, however, did not always take sufficient account of pupils' prior attainment, particularly at S1. Too few teachers provided pupils with specific learning targets to help them to improve their work. A small minority of pupils had additional support needs. The learning support principal teacher was highly effective in identifying and communicating a wide range of strategies to meet their learning needs. Staff contacts with the associated primary schools enabled very good planning for this small group of pupils. They were making good progress towards the targets identified in their well-constructed individualised educational programmes and personal learning plans. These targets were shared with the pupils and monitored carefully to develop next steps in learning. Pupils' attainments were accredited effectively using SQA Access courses.

Learning and personal development

The overall quality of pupils' learning was good. In almost all lessons pupils were very well behaved and worked conscientiously. They were actively involved in most lessons, and especially in French. They collaborated well during group tasks in a number of subjects. For example, S2 pupils responded very positively to an enterprise challenge to make, market, package and present a food product. In most lessons, teachers set a good pace which enabled pupils to make steady progress. In only a minority of classes were pupils given appropriate responsibility for aspects of their learning. Too few pupils were developing independent learning skills. In several subjects, pupils used ICT effectively to carry out research and present their work.

The school provided some effective opportunities for pupils to develop confidence, independence and skills of teamwork. For example, significant numbers participated in the Christmas pantomime, musical performances, residential outdoor education experiences, French exchange visits and football tournaments. Senior pupils studying travel and tourism had organised a very successful hospitality event. However, pupils had few opportunities to exercise responsibility or develop skills of citizenship. Some lacked confidence in expressing their views. Pupils gained some benefits from the PSE programme available from S1 to S5, including effective advice on healthy eating. However, the programme did not enable pupils to develop their knowledge and skills steadily from stage to stage. Overall, the quality of pupils' personal and social development was adequate.

English

Most pupils were responding positively to new approaches to learning and teaching. Teachers gave clear instructions and explained the content of lessons well. Improved use of questioning was helping pupils to develop confidence in their own opinions and to learn from each other. Teachers used praise effectively. They generally matched tasks and resources well to pupils' needs. Pupils had increasing opportunities for active learning by working together on a range of tasks. For example, they regularly presented their ideas for evaluation by their classmates. In some classes, pupils required greater challenge to develop their thinking skills.

Overall, the quality of teaching, meeting pupils' needs and learning was good. Attainment was adequate overall, but with some recent improvements. Particular features included the following.

- At S1/S2, most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in talking and reading, and the majority were doing so in listening and writing. S2 pupils were performing well in their Standard Grade coursework.
- At S3/S4, pupils presented for Standard Grade at S4 performed notably better in English than in their other subjects. The proportion attaining Credit awards was well above the national average. Almost all pupils presented for Standard Grade at S3 in 2006 attained General or Credit awards.
- At S5/S6, the proportion of pupils attaining A-C grades at Higher and Intermediate levels was well below the national average and had decreased. Almost all of the small number of pupils presented for Advanced Higher attained A-C grades.

Mathematics

Teachers had limited success in developing pupils' skills. They did not always give clear and precise explanations, or emphasise key points. Questioning did not make pupils think sufficiently for themselves or develop problem-solving skills. Teachers were improving the use of homework. They generally matched tasks appropriately to pupils' learning needs in classes organised by prior attainment, but less well in classes comprising a wide range of attainment levels. They did not set high enough standards for the neatness and accuracy of pupils' work. Most pupils were well motivated, although some were not sufficiently encouraged to work hard.

Overall, the quality of teaching, meeting pupils' needs and learning was weak. Attainment was weak. Particular features included the following.

- In recent years, only around half of S1/S2 pupils had attained appropriate national levels.
- At S3/S4, pupils presented for Standard Grade at S4 consistently performed less well than in their other subjects. A majority of those presented at S3 in 2006 attained General or Credit awards.

- At S5/S6, the proportion of pupils presented at Higher had declined to well below the national average. Only around half of all pupils presented at this level attained A-C grades. A majority of pupils attained A-C grades at Intermediate 2, but only around one third did so at Intermediate 1.

Chemistry and S1 science

Teachers explained work clearly and sustained pupils' attention effectively overall. They did not involve pupils actively enough during lessons or challenge them sufficiently through questioning. In some courses, pupils required a clearer focus on key learning points. The quality of feedback to pupils, and the use of homework, were too inconsistent. Teachers supported pupils well. The chemistry teacher provided a wide range of courses to help meet pupils' differing needs. In S1 science, all pupils tended to do the same work, regardless of their previous attainment. Pupils generally worked well and collaborated effectively during group activities. They used ICT effectively to support their learning. The pace of progress was too slow in some chemistry lessons, especially for higher-attaining pupils.

Overall, the quality of teaching, meeting pupils' needs and learning was adequate. Attainment was adequate. Particular features included the following.

- At S1/S2, the majority of S1 pupils were performing well in their coursework in science. The one-year course did not include some important areas of science. Progress through Standard Grade chemistry work at S2 was slow at times.
- At S3/S4, the overall proportion of pupils attaining Credit awards in Standard Grade chemistry at S4 was well below the national average. Most pupils presented at S3 in 2006 attained General or Credit awards.
- At S5/S6, pupils' attainment in chemistry was broadly in line with the national average at Intermediate 2, but below the national average at Higher.

Computing

The overall quality of teaching was good. The teacher explained new work clearly and used homework effectively. Lesson aims were not always shared with classes. The teacher used questioning well to check pupils' recall of knowledge. All pupils often carried out the same tasks, some of which did not meet the needs of the highest-attaining pupils. Some pupils' interests in multimedia were being developed appropriately through making and editing digital video. Pupils were motivated, very well behaved and generally on task. Most of the time they worked individually or as a class but, when given the opportunity, they worked well collaboratively.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good, and meeting pupils' needs was adequate. Attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- At S1/S2, pupils could create simple graphics, present numerical data in graphical form and produce reports using a word processor.

- At S3/S4, the proportion of pupils attaining Credit awards at S4 was in line with the national average overall, but had recently decreased. Almost all pupils presented at S3 in 2006 attained General or Credit awards.
- At S5/S6, the majority of pupils studying Higher computing attained A-C grades.

Attainment

Information about the subjects inspected has been given earlier in the report. Across the school, particular features of pupils' progress, results in examinations and other qualifications, including those awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)³ for the three year period 2004-2006, are included below.

By the end of S2 attainment was adequate. Particular features included the following.

- Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in reading and the majority were doing so in writing. Only around half were attaining these levels in mathematics, but there were signs of recent improvement.
- At S1, some pupils were under-achieving because coursework was not sufficiently well matched to their needs.
- Overall, S2 pupils were progressing well through Standard Grade courses.

By the end of S4 attainment was good. Particular features included the following.

- In 2006, the school presented all S3 pupils at Standard Grade for the first time. The proportion of S3 pupils attaining five or more awards at level 4 or better was just a little less than that for S4 pupils presented for the same examinations. Half of all the awards at S3 were at level 5.
- At S4, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more awards at level 4 had been above the national average overall. At level 5, the proportion had improved from below to well above the national average.
- In Standard Grade at S4, pupils had performed better in French than in their other subjects. The proportions of pupils attaining level 5 awards had been well above the national averages overall in French and history. The proportions attaining level 4 and level 5 awards had improved in music and physics.

By the end of S6 attainment was adequate. Particular features included the following.

³ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more awards at SCQF level 5 was above the national average overall but had decreased.
- At level 6, the proportions of pupils attaining three or more and five or more awards had decreased from above to well below the national averages.
- The proportion of pupils attaining one or more awards at level 7 was above the national average.

Across the year-groups, pupils with additional support needs were making good progress towards the appropriate targets set for them.

4. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The quality of pastoral care was adequate. Across the school, staff generally provided a supportive environment for pupils. A regular, information-sharing meeting enabled all staff to be well informed about issues related to pupils' welfare. Promoted pastoral staff took insufficient responsibility for meeting all pupils regularly to discuss their progress and any difficulties they might be experiencing. The school had a range of appropriate policies relating to the care and welfare of pupils, including child protection and risk assessments for school trips. It did not have a policy or procedures for the administration of medicines, or a record of incidents related to bullying. The school had involved community swimming pool staff very effectively in setting appropriate personal fitness and dietary targets for pupils.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>Accommodation was very good. Particular features included the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-maintained building with appropriate security arrangements and suitable access for all users. • High-quality teaching accommodation throughout, enhanced by displays of pupils' work and activities. • Ready access by pupils to modern ICT and quality sports facilities. • A well-furnished but limited social area for pupils.

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Pupils related positively to most of their teachers and to each other. They behaved very well overall. They did not feel that the pupil council was effective in seeking and responding to their views. The morale of most teachers was high. Pupils' activities and achievements were well displayed around the school. Most teachers set appropriate expectations of pupils' behaviour and work-rate, but did not always expect enough of pupils' contributions during lessons. Only some teachers used praise consistently to motivate pupils. Some pupils tended not to have high enough expectations of themselves. They had few opportunities to achieve success in positions of responsibility. The majority of pupils felt they were treated fairly. Boys and girls had equal opportunities. New pupils and those from remote communities were very well integrated and supported. Pupils with additional support needs were effectively included in the life of the school. Approaches to preparing pupils for life in a diverse and multicultural society were poorly planned. Staff lacked appropriate training in race equality.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The quality of partnership with parents and the community was good. Particular features included the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school was well regarded in the local community. • The school used a range of well-presented documentation to communicate effectively with parents, including newsletters and a standards and quality report which outlined school priorities. • The school's efforts to involve parents directly in the life of the school and in improving their children's learning were limited and not very successful. • The School Board had generally positive links with the school and supported it well. • The school benefited from its close links with support agencies, the community learning disabilities nurse, lodgings liaison officer, community sports staff and youth worker. • Effective links had been developed with Lochaber and Inverness colleges, local businesses and other organisations to provide vocational and outdoor education for pupils.

5. Leading and improving the school

The school had been innovative in changing its curriculum structure to help meet pupils' needs and raise achievement for all. Where the impact of the changes could be evaluated so far, there were important signs of improvement. Pupils' motivation at S2 had increased, and the first set of Standard Grade examination results at S3 were encouraging. It was too early to judge the overall effectiveness of this innovation on pupils' achievements by the time they left school. Most staff supported pupils well and overall standards of learning and teaching were good. Pupils behaved very well and worked hard. They required more advice from teachers on ways to improve their work and more consistent development of their independent learning skills. The school did not give sufficient emphasis to pupils' personal and social development.

The impact of leadership across the school was too variable. The headteacher's leadership of the school was adequate overall, with some important strengths. He was well regarded by staff and parents and ensured a positive climate for learning in the school. In recent years, he had faced major challenges in sustaining appropriate levels of staffing. The headteacher kept teachers well informed about national developments in education and involved them well in decision-making. He had clearly identified important aspects of learning, teaching and attainment which required improvement and communicated these to staff. He had won staff support in implementing major curriculum changes. These were very positive steps towards raising pupils' achievement. However, leadership across the school to raise pupils' achievement in other ways was weak. The deputy headteacher and principal teachers of management made some important contributions to the work and life of the school. However, the headteacher had not sufficiently directed and managed their work, or that of promoted pastoral care staff, to impact on the quality of pupils' learning experiences and raise achievement. The strategic planning of curriculum developments in S1 and PSE, for example, was weak. Developments in important aspects of learning and teaching had not been implemented consistently across subjects. Leadership in the area of support for learning was very effective. Most teachers took appropriate responsibility for their subjects, but the impact of leadership and teamwork in mathematics needed significant improvement.

The school consulted parents well about aspects of its work. It had carried out a broad survey of pupils' views on important aspects of the school, including their views about the quality of their learning in each subject. Senior managers had discussed the main findings appropriately with staff, although the impact on pupils' classroom experiences had so far been limited. They visited classrooms to evaluate learning and teaching. However, their evaluations were insufficiently focused and seldom included clear action points to help teachers improve their work. In some areas of the curriculum, senior managers had not monitored pupils' overall learning experiences closely enough. Promoted pastoral staff gave too little attention to monitoring pupils' subject choices. Too few teachers were sufficiently committed to reflecting on and improving their own practice. Most were unsure how to evaluate pupils' attainment in external examinations. Although pupils had individual attainment targets, staff were not monitoring pupils' progress towards these targets systematically. Overall, self-evaluation was weak.

As well as building on the strengths and addressing the issues raised throughout this report, the school and the education authority should address the following main points for action.

Main points for action

- Review timetabling arrangements to reduce the number of teacher contacts with pupils at S1, and provide a better distribution of subject lessons across the week.
- Raise expectations of pupils' achievement and improve attainment at S1 and S5/S6, and in mathematics overall.
- Provide planned opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility.
- Ensure that promoted pastoral staff have regular contacts with all pupils in their care to review their progress.
- Review the structure and remits of promoted posts to ensure greater emphasis on the effective leadership of learning.
- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation across the school, including better coordination and monitoring of pupils' learning at S1, in personal and social education, careers education, and in education about diversity and equality.

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.

Tom Straiton
HM Inspector

4 September 2007

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The following quality indicators have been used in the inspection process to contribute to the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school in promoting learning and achievement for all pupils.

Section 3. How well does the school raise achievement for all?	
Structure of the curriculum	adequate
The teaching process	good
Meeting pupils' needs	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Personal and social development	adequate
Overall quality of attainment: S1/S2	adequate
Overall quality of attainment: S3/S4	good
Overall quality of attainment: S5/S6	adequate

Section 4. How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	adequate
Accommodation and facilities	very good
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	adequate
Equality and fairness	adequate
Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community	good

Section 5. Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	adequate
Leadership across the school	weak
Self-evaluation	weak

This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

The following provides a summary of questionnaire responses. Key issues from the questionnaires have been considered in the inspection and comments are included as appropriate throughout the report.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School buildings were kept in good order. • Their children enjoyed being at the school and were treated fairly. • Staff made parents feel welcome in the school. • School reports provided helpful information about their children's progress. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About a quarter of parents wanted clearer information about the school's priorities for improving pupils' education.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability and helped them when they were having difficulties. • Teachers checked their homework. • They got on well with other pupils. • They felt safe and secure in the school. • The school helped them to stay safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About a third of them wanted pupils to be treated more fairly. • About a quarter of them felt pupils should have more say in deciding how to improve the school.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and ensured that pupils received constructive feedback about their work. • Communication amongst staff was effective. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils, and were aware of the school's procedures for child protection. • The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About a quarter of staff wanted more opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process.

Appendix 3 Attainment in Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels:

7: Advanced Higher at A-C/CSYS at A-C

6: Higher at A-C

5: Intermediate 2 at A-C; Standard Grade at 1-2

4: Intermediate 1 at A-C; Standard Grade at 3-4

3: Access 3 Cluster; Standard Grade at 5-6

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S4

		2004	2005	2006
<i>English and Mathematics</i> <i>@ Level 3</i>	Mallaig High School	95	90	96
	National	91	90	91
<i>5+ @ Level 3 or Better</i>	Mallaig High School	95	87	96
	National	91	90	91
<i>5+ @ Level 4 or Better</i>	Mallaig High School	86	77	93
	National	77	76	77
<i>5+ @ Level 5 or Better</i>	Mallaig High School	27	33	46
	National	35	34	35

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S5

		2004	2005	2006
<i>5+ @ Level 4 or better</i>	Mallaig High School	91	86	77
	National	78	78	78
<i>5+ @ Level 5 or better</i>	Mallaig High School	44	45	44
	National	45	45	45
<i>1+ @ Level 6 or better</i>	Mallaig High School	41	32	36
	National	39	39	38
<i>3+ @ Level 6 or better</i>	Mallaig High School	22	9	18
	National	23	23	22
<i>5+ @ Level 6 or better</i>	Mallaig High School	6	5	5
	National	9	10	10

Percentage of relevant S4 roll attaining by end of S6

		2004	2005	2006
5+ @ Level 5 or better	Mallaig High School	63	53	45
	National	47	47	48
1+ @ Level 6 or better	Mallaig High School	56	53	41
	National	44	43	43
3+ @ Level 6 or better	Mallaig High School	37	34	14
	National	31	30	30
5+ @ Level 6 or better	Mallaig High School	22	19	9
	National	20	19	20
1+ @ Level 7 or better	Mallaig High School	19	13	14
	National	12	12	13

How can you contact us?

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