

**Farr Primary School
and Nursery Class
Inverness
The Highland Council
10 June 2008**

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1. Background

Farr Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in March 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 the chairperson of the Parent Council, and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the villages of Farr and Inverarnie, near Inverness, and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 68, including 18 children in the nursery class. The roll had increased significantly in recent years. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' wider achievements, particularly in their eco-school and health promotion activities.
- The school's approaches to inclusion.
- The strong emphasis given, and steps taken by staff, to ensure the care and welfare of all pupils.
- Productive and successful partnerships with parents and the local community.

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

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to 7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school and nursery class. Parents felt that the school had a good reputation in the community, and that the friendly, caring and supportive staff made them feel welcome. They thought that their children enjoyed being at school. They felt that their children had very good relationships with staff. Pupils thought that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. They felt teachers praised them for doing well and expected them to work as hard as they could. Staff liked working in the school which they felt had a happy, family atmosphere. They thought that the school was well led and that staff worked hard to promote good relations with the local community.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

In the nursery, staff provided a safe and welcoming environment for learning. They promoted children's independence and social skills well and encouraged children to choose healthy foods. Children chose independently from a range of resources and activities. A few activities lacked sufficient challenge. The overall quality of the primary school curriculum was good. There was a strong focus on the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Pupils' citizenship skills were developing well through a stimulating range of whole school enterprise, health promotion and eco-school activities. Visiting specialist teachers and tutors enhanced pupils' experiences of physical education, French, art and design and traditional music. The school provided two hours of good quality physical education weekly for all pupils. Recent improvements to the literacy programme had been successful in promoting positive attitudes to reading and discussing texts. The programmes for environmental studies did not fully ensure the systematic development of pupils' skills. The arrangements for children transferring from the nursery to P1 ensured effective continuity in their learning. Pupils' transition to secondary education was well supported through an effective programme involving staff from Inverness Royal Academy. This included a stimulating health promotion day. In the school as a whole, teaching approaches were adequate. Staff in the nursery interacted well with children to extend their play. Teachers gave clear explanations and made good use of praise to build pupils' self-confidence and reward their achievements. There were examples of effective teaching, particularly in reading and mathematics. Most teachers were skilled in using questions to check pupils' understanding. They shared with pupils what they were expected to learn from their lessons. In too many lessons, teachers did not make consistent use of questions to extend pupils' responses. Teachers did not use feedback consistently to help pupils to improve. They set regular homework tasks but these were not always sufficiently varied.

In the nursery, children expressed themselves creatively in their paintings and drawings. They had created a stimulating frieze of the school's wildlife garden using natural materials. Children were learning to climb and throw and catch balls in the outdoor play area. Play was not sufficiently energetic for some children. The quality of pupils' learning experiences at the primary stages was good. Almost all pupils were well motivated,

enthusiastic and able to work with the minimum of supervision. They were confident, healthy and safe. Pupils applied themselves effectively in a range of learning situations, including when working in pairs and groups. They responded very well when cooperating with others on a range of practical activities, including reading, music and physical education. The pace of learning was not always sufficiently challenging, particularly for higher achieving pupils. Pupils made noteworthy contributions to the life and work of the school in a range of practical, meaningful activities. For example, they worked effectively with a range of agencies to gain Green Flag Eco-Schools Scotland status. This included creating presentations of their achievements using computer graphic packages. They produced well designed plans for local countryside trails. The strong focus on health promotion resulted in pupils being well informed about the need for a healthy lifestyle and a well-balanced diet.

The school placed a strong and effective emphasis on developing pupils' wider achievements. Pupils were developing a sound awareness of environmental education issues through their eco-school work. This involved regular recycling activities and tree planting with members of the Woodland Trust. Those on the pupil council were developing citizenship skills through making many decisions which had improved the school playground, park and pond. The contributions of the school's nutrition group had led to improvements in school meals. The junior road safety officers had helped to improve personal safety at the entrance to the school. Pupils were developing their social, physical and games skills through their regular engagement in cultural, musical and sporting activities. As a mark of their achievement, the whole school had visited the Scottish Parliament where a tapestry they had created was on display. Pupils, nursery children and staff made valuable contributions to the community through enterprise activities, charity fundraising, gardening competitions and drama productions. For many years, pupils at P4 to P7 had been successfully entering a national Newspaper in a Day competition. This had become an annual feature of school work which involved pupils in using their considerable computing and enterprise skills to produce and sell the school newspaper in the local community. Pupils grew their own organic vegetables in the school garden and entered their produce in local garden shows with many successes.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in the development of communication and language skills. They listened well to instructions and talked with confidence to adults and each other. They enjoyed story time and most listened attentively. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. Many attained these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Almost all pupils listened attentively to their teachers and were able to follow instructions. They were confident when speaking to adults and to one another, expressed their ideas clearly and were eager to give their opinions and views. At all stages, pupils read regularly for pleasure and demonstrated a good understanding of the texts they had read. They used a wide range of information books well. By P7, pupils demonstrated a very good knowledge of authors and different types of books they enjoyed reading. Across the school, pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes. Pupils in the P2/P3 class wrote knowledgeably about their space project and had compiled a helpful space dictionary. Pupils at P4 to P7 demonstrated a good knowledge about language and wrote well about imaginative characters they had created. Their skills in writing in a wide range of styles were not yet

well developed. At the early stages, most pupils presented their work neatly. From P4 to P7, presentation was not of a consistently high standard.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their understanding of early mathematics. Most could identify simple shapes, colours and patterns. They were able to match and sort a range of objects and puzzles well. Some could recognise and count numbers to ten. Children's skills in investigating and solving simple mathematical problems in their play were not well developed. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Almost all pupils were consistently attaining appropriate national levels. Pupils at P1 to P3 were making very good progress in their learning. Across the school, many pupils achieved national levels earlier than might normally be expected. A few required either more consolidation or more challenge in their learning. At all stages, pupils handled information effectively using an appropriate range of graphs, charts and diagrams. From P4 to P7, pupils' skills in using information and communications technology to support their mathematical learning were not well developed. Most pupils were competent in mental and written calculation and worked practically and confidently with number, money and time. From P4 to P7 pupils' skills in practical measurement of volume, weight and length required further improvement. Across the school, pupils could identify a range of shapes and describe their properties. Their skills in problem-solving and enquiry were developing well. Pupils did not apply an appropriate range of strategies in practical mathematical tasks in other areas of the curriculum.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Staff in the nursery class supported children well and were sensitive and responsive to the needs of individuals. They assessed children's progress regularly but were not always fully effective in building on children's needs and interests. The organisation and structure of the group within the nursery class did not always give sufficient opportunities for children and staff to work together. At P1 to P7, approaches to meeting pupils' learning needs were adequate. Most teachers matched tasks and activities well to the needs of pupils. This good practice was not consistent. The organisation of teaching groups did not always take sufficient account of pupils' individual learning needs. The pace of learning was too slow for some learners, particularly higher achieving pupils. The school had correctly identified those pupils who required additional assistance with their learning. Support staff were well deployed to meet these learners' needs and support their full integration in classes. Teaching staff prepared individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which they shared fully with parents. Learning targets within these IEPs were not sufficiently focused on pupils' needs. The school had good links with support services such as speech and language therapy and educational psychology, which provided effective individual support.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>The school had very good arrangements to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils. Staff were caring and responsive to pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. They knew what to do in relation to safeguarding pupils. Staff followed comprehensive procedures for dealing with general medical care and the administration of medicines. The school placed a strong and effective emphasis on protocols for pupils in the school with severe allergies. Pupils had a good understanding of issues such as personal safety, bullying and substance misuse. They knew who to contact if they had any concerns and they felt safe and well looked after in school. The school had achieved the status of a Health Promoting School. Staff successfully promoted pupils' health and wellbeing through the health education programme. In particular, the school catering assistant had worked closely with pupils and staff to develop a very healthy and nutritious morning snack which had proved to be extremely successful and popular.</p>
Management and use of resources and space for learning	<p>The overall management of the school's resources and space for learning was weak. The attractive school garden, which was designed and resourced by pupils on the eco committee, provided an area for pupils to work and relax. The school buildings were appropriately secure. The nursery and annexed P2/P3 classroom provided a stimulating environment for learning. Other classrooms, including the P4 to P7 classroom, which was also used as the dining area, were too cramped and did not provide sufficient space for learning. Too many resources were old and worn. Pupils and staff could not access resources easily, especially in the library. The main school building was not easily accessible, particularly to users with restricted mobility.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Equalities, expectations and engagement</p>	<p>Staff, pupils and parents were very proud of their school. There was a strong sense of community, and relationships were very good. Almost all pupils were well behaved and polite, and responded well to teachers' high expectations of their attendance and behaviour. Teachers' expectations of pupils' attainment were not always sufficiently high. Pupils had high expectations of what they could achieve. Almost all pupils took a pride in their achievements and demonstrated a sense of responsibility towards themselves and others. The school successfully recognised pupils' individual achievements at weekly assemblies, in community newsletters and a stimulating newspaper produced by pupils at P4 to P7. Pupils had a good understanding of racial equality issues and the need to take account of individual differences. There were regular opportunities for religious observance through well-established links with the local churches. The school chaplains visited often and provided helpful support to pupils on religious projects.</p>
<p>The school's success in involving parents, carers and families</p>	<p>The school had very successfully involved parents and the wider community in its work. Parents helped to improve school grounds, for example, through organic gardening. They assisted on outings and raised funds. The Parent Council provided effective support to the school. Parents appreciated the regular informal and formal information the teachers provided on the progress of their children. Most parents were positive about the helpful written report provided annually and the opportunity to meet twice each year with teachers to discuss children's progress. Parents were consulted effectively about sensitive health education issues. They knew how to raise concerns with the school and were confident that the school would respond to these appropriately. Pupils benefited from several productive partnerships with local businesses and members of the farming community. Pupils had a good understanding of the world of work. They made valuable improvements to the local area through projects with local countryside rangers and the Woodland Trust on a range of eco initiatives.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Farr Primary School provided a safe and caring environment for learning. Almost all pupils were confident and demonstrated positive attitudes towards themselves and others. The steps taken by all staff to ensure pupils' care and welfare were very effective. The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences was good with headroom for improvement, particularly in English language and mathematics. Pupils were not always sufficiently challenged in their learning and arrangements to support pupils' learning were not always effective enough. Staff, parents and pupils were very proud of their school. The headteacher was working hard to develop teamwork. Much more needed to be done to ensure the work of the school was effectively monitored and evaluated.

The headteacher had well established, positive relationships with parents and the local community. She had ensured pupils' learning had not been adversely affected during a period of significant growth in the school roll and changes in staffing. She had successfully promoted pupils' achievements in the local and wider community. Pupils and staff responded well to these developments. The headteacher was encouraging staff to use and share their expertise to lead aspects of school improvement. Teachers had worked together to improve the literacy programme which was helping pupils to achieve better in this area. Some teachers had recently led well focused health promotion and eco-schools' activities as a basis for ensuring improvement. The school's approaches to self-evaluation were weak. Teaching plans were reviewed and some lessons were monitored by the headteacher. These activities had not resulted in consistent improvements in attainment and to learning and teaching. There had been no significant involvement of staff in evaluating their own work. The school improvement plan contained a manageable number of priorities. There was a lack of rigour in deciding on these priorities and the arrangements to evaluate progress did not ensure sufficient improvement. The headteacher had not taken a sufficiently strong lead in driving forward the school's commitment to maintaining high levels of quality and continuous improvement. With focused support from the education authority the headteacher was well placed to build the school's capacity to improve.

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 five recommendations and two requirements. The two requirements and three recommendations had been dealt with satisfactorily. Two recommendations were ongoing.

Main points for action

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

- teaching approaches at the primary stages;
- approaches to meeting learners' needs and to further raising pupils' attainment;
- the accommodation and the quality of the resources; and
- the arrangements to monitor and evaluate the work of the school and nursery class to ensure continuous improvement.

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.

June Graham
HM Inspector

10 June 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	adequate
Learners' experiences	good
Improvement in performance: English language	good
Improvement in performance: mathematics	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	weak
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
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	adequate
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	adequate
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

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"> • Children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly. • The school had a good reputation in the local community and was well led. • If they raised a matter of concern the school would take action to address it. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school and parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children and there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give clearer information on what standard of work the school expects from pupils.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly and gave them assistance when they were having difficulty with their school work. • Teachers praised them when they had done something well and told them how they were getting on with their work. • The school kept them safe and healthy and they knew what to do at school if they were upset. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make homework more interesting.

What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff liked working in the school and felt the school was well led. They showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • Staff worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community. • Standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • Pupils' successes were regularly celebrated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the accommodation.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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