

**Dalwhinnie Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Highland Council
29 January 2008**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	1
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	4
7. Leading and improving the school	5
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	7
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	8
How can you contact us?	9

1. Background

Dalwhinnie Primary School and nursery class was inspected in November 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 Parent Council, and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the village of Dalwhinnie and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was eight, including a nursery class. There were no pupils at the P1-P3 stages. 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.

As part of a cluster arrangement, the headteacher shared the leadership of both Dalwhinnie Primary School and Newtonmore Primary School.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- A wide range of activities which encouraged pupils' creativity.
- The quality of teaching, and of pupils' learning experiences.
- Friendly, courteous pupils who were keen to learn.
- High quality relationships between pupils and staff and the very positive partnerships with parents and the wider community.
- Leadership of the headteacher.

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 P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about all aspects of the school. Parents thought that teachers set high standards for pupils' work and encouraged pupils to work hard. They felt that their children enjoyed being at school and that the school was well led. Pupils were proud of their school and felt safe and well looked after there. They thought that teachers explained work clearly to them and helped them when they had difficulty with their learning. All staff enjoyed working in the school. They thought that pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

In the nursery class, children were encouraged to choose from an interesting range of learning opportunities. At the primary stages, the overall structure of the curriculum was very good. Teachers ensured that pupils developed a wide range of skills. Staff used science and technology lessons well to develop pupils' skills in carrying out investigations and practical activities. Recent improvements in the literacy programme had improved pupils' motivation to read more readily. Staff made very effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) to develop pupils' skills in a range of areas. At P6 and P7, pupils were learning French and all pupils were learning Gaelic. All pupils benefited from two hours of physical activity each week, in line with national recommendations. In the nursery class, staff used praise very well to encourage children and help them feel secure. Staff made effective use of questions and talked with children skilfully to develop their confidence. At the primary stages, the quality of teaching was very good. Teachers were very well organised and planned carefully what they wanted pupils to learn. They made very good use of a range of assessment strategies to help pupils' with their learning. They shared with pupils what they needed to do to achieve success and used praise effectively. Staff set an appropriate variety of homework tasks to support pupils' learning.

Children in the nursery class were making very good progress. They were developing their observation skills well by planting bulbs outdoors in the garden soil and comparing how they grow outside to others which were grown in clear containers filled with water. Children printed with vegetables and expressed their own ideas creatively using art and craft materials. They were developing very good hand and finger control, but did not have sufficient opportunities for energetic physical activity. At the primary stages, the quality of pupils' learning was very good. All pupils were well motivated, hard working and keen to learn. Pupils listened well to teachers' instructions and responded well to all activities. They cooperated effectively with one another in pairs, trios and class groups. This included designing and making objects which included light, sound and movement as part of the design. Pupils also worked together to create and present music using percussion. Pupils made effective use of computers for a range of purposes, including compiling a local guide book, maintaining contact with

pupils in a neighbouring school, and collecting and displaying information. They had used a range of skills to gather information for their guide book, including life drawings, mapping skills, research, writing and ICT.

The school had taken some very effective steps to promote pupils' personal and social development and to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Pupils were developing their awareness of what it means to be a responsible citizen by participating in a range of activities. These included working on the pupil council, developing and maintaining the school garden and involvement in planting projects in Cairngorm National Park. Pupils benefited from a range of successful enterprise education projects. They had worked effectively alongside pupils in neighbouring schools at their joint annual sports day and mini Highland games. At P7, pupils developed effective personal and social skills as a result of their annual residential experience. Those at P6 and P7 also benefited from a range of outdoor physical activities including skiing and snow boarding. The school had been successful in gaining a health promoting school award and pupils were knowledgeable about healthy lifestyles and healthy eating. On a monthly basis they organised a healthy 'Munch Bunch Lunch' for all pupils and staff.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in communication and language. They enjoyed listening to stories and rhymes and were developing their skills in talking confidently with adults. Children's early writing skills were developing appropriately. Their skills in looking at books independently and recognising their names in print were not yet sufficiently well developed. The overall quality of attainment in English language at the primary stages, was good. Pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading, writing, listening and talking. In reading, several pupils were achieving these national levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress with their learning. With greater challenge, pupils were capable of higher levels of attainment. Pupils listened well to instructions and spoke confidently about their personal experiences. Most read fluently and with good expression. They could confidently discuss their favourite books and a range of authors. They understood the main ideas in texts they read. Pupils wrote well for a range of different purposes. Their written work was normally well presented. At the upper stages, there was scope to improve the length and quality of writing produced and to give further opportunities for extended writing pieces.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery class were making good progress in developing their early mathematics. They enjoyed solving problems and discussing numbers in play situations. At the primary stages, the quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment. Almost half were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress with their learning. At all stages, pupils could interpret information from graphs. Pupils at P6 and P7 were confident in using ICT to organise and present information. Most pupils carried out written calculations with accuracy. Pupils were not sufficiently secure in mental calculations. They had appropriate knowledge of simple fractions and shape but were less confident

with aspects of measurement, including estimating length. Pupils had a good knowledge of problem solving strategies and could apply these with confidence.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

In the nursery class, children's needs were well met. Staff were very responsive to individual children. They made appropriate observations of children at play and used this information effectively to identify the next steps in their learning. Planning for learning did not always respond effectively enough to meet the needs of all children. At the primary stages, approaches to meeting pupils' needs were good. Teachers provided a good range of tasks and activities. Teaching and support staff provided helpful assistance to pupils with additional support needs. Individualised educational programmes, with appropriate learning targets, were in place. The support for learning teacher gave appropriate and helpful advice to staff.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The school provided pupils with high quality pastoral support. Staff knew their pupils very well and effectively ensured that their social, emotional and physical needs were met. The school had appropriate procedures in place to ensure the care, welfare and protection of children. All staff were trained in current child protection procedures and knew how to implement these. All pupils and children were involved in a daily teeth brushing programme. Pupils responded well to a range of activities which improved their health and wellbeing. Nursery children were provided with a healthy snack. Effective transition arrangements were in place to support children as they moved from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Kingussie High School.
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good and included an appropriate secure entry system. The school was well maintained and clean. Classrooms were bright and provided a stimulating environment for learning. Computing facilities in the classroom were good. Access to parts of the building was difficult for those with restricted mobility. There was appropriate outdoor space and staff used the school garden well to promote pupils' learning. The school did not provide meals at lunchtime. There was no dedicated space for dining arrangements. Although there was appropriate outdoor space, there were drainage problems in the grassed area.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Parents, pupils and staff had a strong sense of identity and pride in the school. Staff had created a very welcoming environment. Staff and pupil morale was high. Relationships between pupils and staff were of a high standard. Staff worked well as a team. Pupils were polite and courteous and standards of behaviour were high. Staff had high expectations of pupils' attendance and behaviour, but they needed to raise further their expectations of pupils' attainment. Staff recognised and celebrated pupils' achievements. The school chaplain gave helpful support to the school and regular assemblies provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Staff treated pupils fairly and ensured that all were included in the life and work of the school. Staff did not yet promote racial and cultural diversity sufficiently enough through the curriculum.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school's partnership with parents and the local community was very good. Parents actively contributed to school events. Parents and members of the wider community had been involved in designing, creating and building the school garden. Regular and informative newsletters kept parents up to date with the life of the school. Parents received a helpful annual written pupil report and had regular opportunities to meet with teachers. They were suitably consulted about sensitive aspects of the school's health programme. The school made effective use of partnerships in the wider community, including those with the Active Schools Coordinator, the community police officer and the school nurse.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Dalwhinnie Primary School provided a high standard of education for pupils within a caring environment. There was a climate of mutual respect and trust where pupils and staff felt valued. A wide range of effective learning experiences were being delivered. Pupils were motivated and keen to learn and were given a range of opportunities to be creative and think for themselves. They were achieving good standards of attainment in English language and mathematics.

The experienced headteacher provided very good leadership. She had a clear vision for the school and ensured that this was reflected in the activities provided. She enjoyed the strong support of parents and staff. The headteacher was highly regarded by

parents, pupils and staff and had established a strong sense of teamwork across the school. Her teaching was of a high quality and she had been successful in improving aspects of the school's work, including reading, science and ICT. Effective arrangements were in place for the day to day management of the school when the headteacher attended her other school. With the continuing support of the education authority the headteacher and staff had the clear capacity to improve the school further. The school's approaches to self-evaluation were good. A number of effective systems were in place to monitor aspects of the school's work. This included monitoring of teachers' plans, sampling pupils' work and observing classroom practice. The class teacher had visited teachers from a neighbouring school to share and observe practice. The headteacher had not yet used attainment data rigorously or consistently enough to ensure that all pupils made appropriate progress. There was no specific development plan for the nursery class which was reinstated in August 2007. Nursery staff were aware of the Scottish Services Council's Codes of Practice.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were two recommendations which had been addressed.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- improve pupils' attainment in mental calculation and writing; and
- improve approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. 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 the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Isabel Robb
HM Inspector

29 January 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?	
Structure of the curriculum	very good
The teaching process	very good
Pupils' learning experiences	very good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

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

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

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Self-evaluation	good

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. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

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 all aspects of the school's work.	<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 and Communications Team, 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.

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