

**Auldearn Primary School
The Highland Council
8 March 2005**

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1. Background

Auldearn Primary School was inspected in November 2004 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school and the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

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

The school serves the village of Auldearn and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 185, including 18 in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The nursery class was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Relationships between staff and pupils and the school's strong links with parents and the local community.
- Commitment of staff to improving the school.
- Accommodation and facilities.
- Opportunities for, and the achievements of, pupils outwith formal classes.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, 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 and carers were very pleased with the work of the school. They felt that it had a good reputation in the community and that they were made welcome in the school. They thought that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils and that the school would take action if they had a concern. Pupils felt that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. They also felt that they had a say in improving the school. All teachers liked

working in the school and all felt that the pupils were enthusiastic about learning. About half did not feel that the school was well led or that there was effective teamwork and communication. Support staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. However, some felt that they were not sufficiently included in determining the future direction of the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided a broad and balanced curriculum. The school's participation in a pilot scheme to teach aspects of the curriculum by subject specialist teachers from the associated secondary school, Nairn Academy, enhanced and extended pupils' learning experiences. There was good joint planning between staff and the visiting teachers of drama, music, physical education, art and design, health and technology, and information and communications technology (ICT). Staff did not make enough use of cross-curricular aspects to provide contexts for improving pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics. Teachers prepared their lessons well, gave clear instructions and explanations to pupils and enjoyed very good relationships with them. There was some very good interactive teaching where teachers set clear targets for learning and shared these with pupils. Staff paid good attention to the differing learning styles of boys and girls. Teachers used questioning well to keep pupils focused on their work and to check their knowledge and understanding. While home work was given regularly, too often it did not challenge pupils sufficiently.

Pupils' skills in ICT were good and effectively enhanced their learning. They made effective use of computers to undertake research tasks, develop word processing skills and practise number skills. In almost all lessons pupils worked quietly and purposefully. In these lessons, pupils frequently worked well together in groups or in pairs. Pupils in P4 to P7 evaluated their own work and that of others through the drama and writing programmes. However, they did not always understand clearly enough what they had to do to improve their learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Pupils participated in a good range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities. The school cricket and football teams had been particularly successful in the respective Nairnshire leagues. Pupils had achieved notable successes in Highland Schools' Athletics competitions and orienteering. They contributed well to community events, for example, by participating in the switch-on ceremony for the Christmas lights in Nairn and the annual village pageant. Senior pupils had good opportunities to take responsibility as members of the pupil council and by acting as playground monitors. The pupil council was very effective in suggesting improvements and providing opportunities for decision making. Pupils benefited from a good range of adult visitors who spoke to them about their experiences and discussed important social and historical issues with them.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was fair. Standards of attainment in reading and writing had declined over the last three years and were below national averages. However, as a result of focused action, there were recent signs of improvement. Almost all pupils at P1 to P3, and the majority from P4 to P7 were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. Most had attained these in listening and talking. Almost all pupils listened attentively in class and responded well to teachers' questions. In some classes, however, they had difficulty in taking turns in group discussion. At all stages, pupils read regularly for enjoyment. They showed a good appreciation of the writer's craft in poems they had read but did not always identify main messages. They planned their writing well and produced well constructed letters. Pupils required further opportunities to compose poetry and write at extended length for a variety of purposes. Pupils' knowledge about English grammar was not well developed.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was fair. At some stages too many pupils did not achieve appropriate national levels across all attainment outcomes. The pattern of attainment in mathematics over the last three years had fluctuated. Pupils in the early stages were confident in using the language of mathematics and had made good progress. Pupils in P1 to P3 were developing good number skills. At P4 to P7, pupils were proficient in using computer packages to draw graphs and use spreadsheets. At P7, pupils performed well in written and mental calculations but were less secure when converting fractions into decimals. Their knowledge of the properties of shape was good.

Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry were insufficiently developed at all stages. At the middle and upper stages pupils had been insufficiently challenged and the pace of learning had been too slow in mathematics.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's arrangements for ensuring the care and welfare of pupils were mostly effective. All staff knew their pupils very well and were strongly committed to supporting their learning and development. Key members of staff had received recent training on the implementation of child protection procedures. There were clear plans to extend this training to those who had not yet been trained. Almost all occurrences of bullying or bad behaviour were appropriately dealt with. Staff handled any discipline problems firmly and constructively. In a very few instances staff had not been completely successful in reassuring pupils that their concerns had been fully dealt with and continued to support them. Looked after children and other potentially vulnerable children were very well supported.

Learning support staff maintained very detailed records and plans for pupils with additional support needs. They made very effective use of individualised educational programmes. These programmes set clear and specific long- and short-term targets. They worked closely with class teachers and consulted and planned regularly with them. In some classes, teachers provided a range of differentiated tasks to meet pupils' needs. However, most teachers did

not make sufficient use of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning or target weaknesses in pupils' understanding. Pupils in the early stages were very well supported in class. From P4 to P7, approaches to developing writing ensured pupils were well challenged in the tasks set. However, in other aspects of the curriculum, pupils were not always challenged to give of their best.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of the accommodation and facilities was very good. The school was set in spacious grounds and was well maintained. Pupils made good use of the extensive grassed areas for a range of games and recreational activities. The security system was appropriate. Resources were in good supply and ICT facilities were very well provided. Teachers made effective use of attractive displays of pupils' work to enhance the opportunities for learning in classrooms.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Pupils and staff identified strongly with the school. Pupils were well consulted through the pupil council. They carried out surveys of opinion and used suggestion boards. Visitors and parents were made to feel welcome. Relationships between staff and pupils were positive. At P1 to P3 teachers' and pupils' expectations were high. In a few lessons, at P4 to P7, teachers' expectations of what pupils could attain were not always high enough. Recent initiatives to promote pupils' personal and social development were beginning to be effective. There was a very successful system for recognising pupils' effort and achievement using house points and certificates. There were appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Equality and fairness were actively promoted throughout the school. Pupils with disabilities participated fully in school activities. Staff, pupils and visitors felt safe and secure. The school was making good progress towards becoming a health promoting school through a range of initiatives including regular exercise and developing an understanding of healthy eating.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The School Board and the PTA gave very good support to the school. Parents had arranged a number of very successful fund raising activities. The school produced regular, informative newsletters for parents and provided opportunities for parents of newly enrolled P1 pupils to learn about the school's curriculum and routines. Parents valued highly the school's open door policy and were encouraged to view any classroom resources about which they might have concerns. Parent volunteers supported many of the extra-curricular activities. The school had very good links with neighbouring schools through its participation in a pilot scheme to teach specialist subjects in Nairnshire primary schools. A range of local businesses actively supported the school's fund-raising activities. Reports to parents on their children's progress were regular and detailed.

7. Improving the school

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

Auldearn Primary School offered pupils a supportive, caring environment. Staff knew their pupils very well and provided very good support to those experiencing difficult circumstances. Almost all pupils were enthusiastic about their school work but they were not always sufficiently challenged. Levels of attainment had declined to below national averages. However, staff were beginning to work more effectively as a team and this was having a positive impact on pupils' attainment in P1 to P3, and on writing from P4 to P7.

The headteacher had been in post for a year at the time of the inspection. She was highly committed to the school and the community. She had developed positive partnerships with the community and had fostered good relationships with parents and pupils. She had identified weaknesses in attainment and had taken steps to improve this by introducing additional training and resources and redeploying staff. She was enthusiastic in providing extra-curricular activities and a range of additional experiences for pupils through visits and visitors. However, there were some important weaknesses in her leadership of the school. She had not communicated a sufficiently clear vision for the school and as a result had not yet gained the full support of all staff. She had regular meetings with her staff but these required to be more focused with clear outcomes and action points. The headteacher had made a sound start to observing learning and teaching and reviewing teachers' forward plans. However, the feedback she provided had not been sufficient to ensure a consistently high quality of learning, teaching and attainment across the school.

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvement in:

- attainment in English language and mathematics;
- procedures to monitor and evaluate learning, teaching and attainment;
- the use of assessment information to plan next steps in learning;
- the procedures for tracking and predicting pupils' attainment at all stages and meeting the needs of higher attaining pupils;
- communication between senior management and staff; and
- the provision for clear guidance and pathways for future development to which staff and pupils can aspire.

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. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in a report to parents and carers, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector

8 March 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pastoral care
- Expectations and promoting achievement

We judged the following to be fair

- Pupils' learning experience
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be unsatisfactory

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

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

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • School buildings were kept in good order. • The quality of education in the school. • The school's very friendly atmosphere. • The progress that pupils made. • Helpful and approachable staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for dropping off and picking up children.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers explained things clearly. • Teachers told them when they have done something well. • Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of a few pupils.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • Indiscipline was dealt with effectively. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • The constructive feedback given to pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular staff discussion about how to achieve school priorities. • The development of teamwork. • Communication and leadership. • More focused staff meetings, clearer conclusions and action points.

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 & 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.co.uk.

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