

**Culter School
and Nursery Class
Peterculter
Aberdeen City Council
22 April 2008**

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1. Background

Culter School and Nursery Class were inspected in January 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, a group of parents¹ and members of the local community.

The school serves the village of Peterculter. At the time of the inspection the roll was 382, including 51 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The broad curriculum and range of stimulating after-school activities.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics, reading and writing.
- Well-mannered children and pupils who were enthusiastic about learning.
- Positive relationships and the high standard of care, including nursery provision.
- The school's success in involving parents and the quality of partnerships with the community.
- The leadership of the school, including the nursery class.

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.

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

Almost all parents were positive about the work of the school and the nursery. Parents felt that staff in the nursery knew their children well and responded appropriately to their individual needs. They stated that their children enjoyed going to nursery and found the activities interesting. Parents thought that the school had a good reputation in the community. Parents thought that their children enjoyed being at school and staff showed concern for their care and welfare. Parents felt that teachers set high standards for pupils and that the school was well led. Pupils enjoyed being at the school and felt safe and happy. They thought that the school was good at dealing with incidents of bullying. Pupils felt their teachers explained things clearly and told them when they did things well. Almost all staff were positive about most aspects of the school. They liked working in the school, thought that the school was well led and felt that pupils' successes were regularly celebrated. A few support staff felt that they would like to be more involved in the decision-making processes within the school.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall quality of the curriculum across the nursery and at the primary stages was very good. Children in the nursery class were encouraged, and supported, to plan, make decisions and persevere with tasks. An active learning and movement programme provided very good opportunities for children in the nursery and at the early stages of primary to enjoy their learning through play. Across the primary stages, pupils experienced a wide range of challenging and enjoyable activities that enabled them to develop relevant skills in enterprise education. Specialist teachers made effective contributions to pupils' learning in the expressive arts, particularly music. All pupils received two hours of quality physical education each week, in line with national recommendations. This was further extended through the active participation of most pupils in a wide range of sporting clubs and activities outwith the school day. Through the personal and social education (PSE) programme pupils were learning how to keep safe and stay healthy. Pupils' citizenship skills were enriched through participation in the Eco Schools initiative. Environmental studies topics provided very good opportunities for cross-curricular work for pupils. For example, pupils in P3 were successfully using drama and dance to act out the movement of the sea creatures they were studying in their environmental studies project. At all stages, pupils had regular, effective opportunities to develop skills in the use of information and communications technology (ICT), including the use of interactive whiteboards. The quality of teaching was good overall with some high quality examples of very effective teaching. In the nursery, all staff used praise appropriately to celebrate children's efforts and achievements and to build confidence and self-esteem. They engaged well with children during play activities and most used discussion and dialogue well to extend children's learning. At the primary stages, all teachers were well organised and created purposeful learning environments. Most used a wide range of teaching approaches to engage pupils in their learning. Pupils were encouraged to express their views and to ask questions. However, in a few lessons the pace of teaching was slow and, on occasion, pupils were unclear of what was expected from them. Most teachers gave clear explanations and made good use of questioning and discussion to recall previous work and to reinforce and extend pupils' learning. In the best lessons, the pace of

learning was brisk and pupils were able to work independently and in groups with the minimum of supervision. However, in a few lessons, tasks were not sufficiently challenging and pupils needed to be more independent in their learning. Across the school, teachers set a good range of relevant homework activities which was varied and linked well to classwork.

Children in the nursery were making good progress in their learning and development. They were confident in role-play and enthusiastically acted out roles in the café and doctor's surgery. A few children were able to solve simple problems and were developing their understanding of growth and change through the cultivation of plants. They showed confidence in using simple programs on the computer. In the outdoor area, children played energetically, gaining an appropriate awareness of space and safe practices in physical activity. Almost all children demonstrated very good control of their hands and fingers using a range of tools. The overall quality of learners' experiences at the primary stages was good. Almost all pupils were very enthusiastic and eager to participate in learning tasks and activities. They behaved very well and concentrated hard on their learning. In most classes, pupils worked very well together in small groups. For example, in P7 pupils agreed and fed back the strengths and areas for improvement on one another's presentations.

The school took very good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Pupils were confident in their approach to learning and were willing to tackle new situations and experiences. In the nursery, children were making very good progress in sharing and cooperating with one another. Most were developing friendships and all children were very well behaved. Across the school, pupils were developing a sound awareness of environmental education issues through the Eco Schools project, through which they were working towards a silver award. Pupils were participating effectively in decision making through class discussions and their involvement in the well established pupil council and Eco Committee. Lunch and after-school activities were very well attended by pupils including scripture union, *Fun French* and the *Casket* after-school club. Pupils had achieved high levels of success in a wide range of sporting events, including basketball and football. The highly acclaimed school choir had achieved success at the local musical festival and pupils sang at a range of local events. The school made very good contributions to the community through well designed enterprise activities and charity donations. Pupils were enthusiastic about their enterprise card company and spoke confidently and knowledgeably about the work they were doing.

English language

Children in the nursery were making good progress in communication and language. Most were confident when talking to adults and to one another. They listened well to instructions and stories and a few used the book corner independently to read and use books to find information. A few older children were able to recognise the shape and sound of familiar letters and were beginning to write their own name. The overall quality of attainment in English language at the primary stages was very good. Almost all pupils were reaching appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and writing. However, the school had yet to monitor and assess systematically pupils' attainment in listening and talking. Over the last five years, pupils' attainment in

reading had remained consistently high with over half of the pupils in P2 achieving these levels earlier than expected. There had been a steady increase in attainment in writing over the last three years. Across all stages pupils, including pupils with additional support needs, were making good progress in their classwork. Almost all pupils listened attentively and were very good at following instructions. They were confident when talking to adults and to one another, expressed their ideas clearly and were eager to give opinions and views. At the early and middle stages, most pupils read well and demonstrated a good understanding of the texts they were reading. At the upper stages, most read regularly for pleasure and talked with enthusiasm about the books they had enjoyed. By P7, pupils had a very good knowledge of authors and types of books. At all stages pupils wrote well for a range of purposes. Most pupils presented very good quality written work across all subject areas. Across all stages, most pupils demonstrated a good knowledge about language, were creative and imaginative when writing stories and presented their written work neatly.

Mathematics

Children in the nursery were making good progress in early mathematics. A few children were able to count to ten confidently and sort and match objects by shape and colour. A few could recognise and name simple shapes around the playroom. However, there were not yet sufficient opportunities for children to further develop the use of their senses and an understanding of mathematics and problem solving during play activities. The overall attainment for mathematics at the primary stages was very good. The school had maintained consistently high standards of attainment over recent years. At the early stages, a significant number of pupils were achieving these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Almost all pupils, including pupils with additional support needs, were making very good progress in their classwork. Pupils were using ICT to a high standard to handle information and to link with enterprise activities, particularly at the upper stages. Pupils' skills in mental mathematics were well developed. Their written and mental calculations were accurate and, at the middle stages, pupils showed a very good understanding of symmetry. Pupils at P3 could describe the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes and by P7 had a good understanding of angles and co-ordinates. Across the school, pupils' knowledge of problem solving strategies was beginning to develop well with valuable opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in different contexts, for example through enterprise activities.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's approaches to meeting learning needs were good. Staff in the nursery observed children and noted their responses to play activities. They used assessment information well to plan for children's learning. However, some activities did not always provide sufficient challenge for all children and opportunities for younger children to explore and investigate using their senses were too limited. Staff in the nursery were not sufficiently familiar with legislation in relation to supporting children with additional support needs. Across the primary stages, pupils responded enthusiastically to a good range of learning activities which took good account of their abilities and prior learning. However, a few tasks were insufficiently challenging for a

small number of pupils. All pupils were fully involved in setting their own personal learning targets which were shared with parents. Robust procedures were in place to identify pupils with additional support needs. The additional support for learning (ASFL) teacher liaised very effectively with staff, parents and partner services. She gave very good support to pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning, including individual learning plans and individual educational programmes. Pupils were set learning targets for improvement and a tracking system was in place to monitor their progress. Support for higher achieving pupils was also well organised. Support assistants made very positive contributions to supporting individuals and groups of pupils throughout the school, during class time and in the playground and dining hall. Partner agencies, including educational psychology and speech and language therapy, provided valuable support and advice to staff and pupils. The school had sought the advice of the English as an additional language service to plan learning for pupils for whom English is a second language.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	<p>Staff provided very good pastoral support. The caring and committed staff knew the children and pupils well and were sensitive to their physical, social and emotional needs.</p> <p>There was a clearly stated child protection policy and all staff had received relevant training and were knowledgeable in procedures relating to this. Staff dealt effectively with incidents concerning pupil behaviour, including bullying. Children and pupils responded well to the school's clearly established procedures which rewarded them for good behaviour. Pupils could describe the school's procedures for dealing with bullying and were able to discuss confidential matters with the approachable headteacher or with any member of staff. They had good opportunities to discuss a range of relevant topics through their PSE programme, including how to keep themselves safe. The school placed a strong emphasis on health promotion which included regular exercise and healthy eating. The school had very good arrangements to support pupils when they moved from nursery into P1 and from P7 into Cults Academy. The ASFL teacher liaised closely with secondary school staff to help ensure a seamless transition for pupils with additional support needs.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Management and use of resources and space for learning</p>	<p>The accommodation was very good. Although the building was over 100 years old, the facilities were well suited to pupils' needs and provided a safe, attractive and effective environment for learning. Classrooms were bright and spacious and there were high quality displays of pupils' achievements throughout the building. Other enhancing features included the nursery garden where staff were developing a stimulating and interesting natural environment for children to learn. Throughout the nursery and the school, staff used resources well to motivate pupils in their learning. Facilities for ICT were very good. Arrangements for security were appropriate and were applied consistently by staff and visitors. Access for those with mobility difficulties was good in most areas of the school.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness</p>	<p>Pupils, parents and staff shared a strong sense of pride in their school. Staff throughout the nursery and school had created an environment where children and parents were made to feel welcome. Pupils were well mannered and talked confidently to visitors. Pupil and staff morale was very high and relationships between pupils and staff were very good. Staff made very effective contributions to the life of the school and worked well together. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' behaviour, attendance and attainment. Weekly assemblies provided very good opportunities to acknowledge pupils' achievements and share successes. Incentives such as the 'Culter top table', house points, star writer and achievement awards helped to motivate pupils. The school chaplain was a regular visitor to the school, providing good support at assemblies and in classes. All children in the nursery and pupils in the school were treated equally and with equal concern. Learning about equality and fairness was a regular feature of religious and moral education and PSE activities. Pupils learned about racial equality and cultural diversity throughout the curriculum. In classes and through religious observance, pupils were learning well about the beliefs and customs of other world religions.</p>

Aspect	Comment
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	The school involved parents and the local community very well in its work. Relationships between nursery staff and families were very strong. Parents and staff had very good opportunities to formally and informally discuss children's progress. Staff had successfully engaged parents in their children's learning through a number of staff led initiatives. The school communicated effectively with parents through regular newsletters. An excellent website provided a wealth of information for parents and pupils on the school and the curriculum. This and the school blog were used extensively by parents. Parents had very good opportunities to comment on the work of the school. For example, the school had consulted parents on the use of personal learning planning for pupils. Teachers provided helpful progress reports for parents each year and parents were fully informed when sensitive health issues were being taught. The Parent Council was active in supporting the school. The school initiated the <i>Culter Satellite Group</i> which provided helpful support for parents and pupils. Parents and families also had regular opportunities to meet and discuss concerns. Pupils regularly entertained parents and members of the local community with plays and concerts.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Culter School and Nursery Class provided a very positive and supportive learning environment. Staff were sensitive and responsive to learners' needs. Teamwork throughout the nursery and the school was highly effective and behaviour was very good. The development of more challenging approaches in a minority of classes would further enhance the climate for learning. Almost all pupils were making very good progress in their learning and the standard of pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was very good. Commendably, the school had enriched and extended the many opportunities for pupils to learn through the active promotion of enterprise education and the wide range of activities on offer within the school. Parents played a strong role in the work of the school.

The headteacher provided the school with very good leadership. She had a clear vision aimed at ensuring continuous improvement and creating a very effective learning environment. She was innovative, well organised and engaged well with staff and parents. The headteacher had raised the profile of achievement across the school ensuring that all pupils received credit for their successes. Along with the deputy headteacher, she had developed a very positive ethos across the school, promoting high expectations and strong teamwork. The deputy headteacher was approachable,

enthusiastic and very supportive of the headteacher. He brought important organisational skills, was highly knowledgeable and had a positive influence on the work of the school. For example, he successfully monitored and ensured high levels of work in mathematics. The two principal teachers who shared the remit of the vacant deputy headteacher post carried out their remits very well. They provided very good role models in teaching and successfully led curriculum developments. In the nursery class, the principal teacher had supported staff well through a time of considerable change. Good leadership was evident in the ways in which the school had pursued continuous improvement. Staff across the school took leading roles in aspects of the school's work, including developing enterprise education. Pupils also showed some important leadership qualities, including their work in the pupil council and Eco Committee. The school had good systems in place to monitor and evaluate its work. Senior managers commented on teachers' plans and monitored pupils' progress effectively. However, there were not yet appropriate systems in place to monitor pupils' progress in listening and talking. The headteacher and deputy headteacher observed learning and teaching and provided teachers with very good advice on how to improve their practice. Parents, pupils and staff were consulted appropriately on aspects of the school and were active in identifying school improvement priorities. The school was very well placed to continue to build on its success.

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 two requirements and two recommendations that had been actioned.

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:

- continue to develop more rigorous quality assurance procedures including the systematic monitoring of listening and talking; and
- further increase the capacity for independent learning by ensuring appropriate pace and challenge for all pupils, including children in the nursery.

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.

Jane Lopez
HM Inspector

22 April 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	very good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Learners' experiences	good
Improvement in performance: English language	very good
Improvement in performance: mathematics	very good

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	very good
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very 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	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	very good
Leadership of improvement and change (across the school)	very good
Improvement through 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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed being at school and found school work stimulating and challenging. • The school had a good reputation in the local community. • Staff treated their children fairly and showed concern for their care and welfare. • Matters of concern were dealt with by the school. • The school was well led. 	<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"> • They felt safe and well looked after. • Teachers explained things clearly and told them when they did things well. • Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could and checked their homework. • They knew what to do if they were upset and felt the school was good at dealing with any incidents of bullying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
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 pupil attainment. • Maintained good relations with the local community. • They liked working in the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few support staff would like to be more involved in the decision-making processes within the school.

Appendix 3 Good practice

In the course of the inspection, the following aspects of innovative and effective practice were evaluated as being worthy of wider dissemination.

Active learning and movement programme

The programme was aimed at children in the nursery and the early stages of primary school. The aim was to develop active learning opportunities alongside movement sessions. Areas of the curriculum, such as maths and language, had become more practical as a result of the programme. This had helped staff ensure a better transition for pupils from nursery into P1. A wide range of resources for active learning were in place which pupils found highly motivating. Pupils were observed working well together, talking confidently to each other and developing a number of important skills. Activities included building a safe environment through construction, weighing and measuring activities, recognising letters through digging for treasure, working in the baby clinic and completing language activities on the computer. All activities were varied and stimulating and all children enjoyed tasks and worked at them industriously. Benefits included the seamless progression from nursery and high quality learning opportunities.

Culter Satellite Group

This group was set up to provide a multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable children up to seven years old and their families. The initiative involved working with a local independent school and the Deeside Family Centre. The group was led by staff from the local education authority. Pupils took part in play therapy sessions which helped promote positive social and communication skills. They were gaining in confidence and finding solutions to any behaviour difficulties. Parents met together to discuss common issues and reported they felt well supported by the group. A sub-group *Parents resources of Culter School* met once a week in the school to further support each other. On occasions, professionals, such as social workers, had attended the group to offer additional advice and support for parents.

Culter School website

This helpful and accessible school website was very attractively presented and gave highly informative examples of a range of school activities and initiatives. The website gave details of pupils' achievements, examples of pupils' work, information about school events, the Culter Card Enterprise Company and information about the many clubs including chess, basketball and badminton. The recently developed blog was an innovative addition to the website. It allowed parents and pupils to communicate with each other regarding recent events and school activities. Newsletters were posted on the site and at every stage there was excellent information on current project work, including links to other valuable sites. Digital video was used very effectively to highlight pupils' learning. Pupils were sharing their views and opinions on what they were learning. For example, pupils could post their evaluation of the books they were reading. Currently the website had been accessed over 30,000 times and was a valuable tool in enhancing pupils' learning and communicating with parents and the community.

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 Head of Service, Culture and Learning, 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, Greyfriars House, Gallowgate, Aberdeen AB10 1LQ or by telephoning 01224 642544. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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