

**Ardvreck School
Crieff
Perthshire**

10 December 2002

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Ardvreck School Crieff, Perthshire

1. Introduction

Ardvreck School was inspected in May 2002 as part of a national sample of primary and secondary education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated how well pupils were performing, the effectiveness of the school and how well the school was managed.

HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, mathematics, French, music, and information and communications technology. As a result of pupils' involvement in Common Entrance and other examinations, classes in Forms 5 and 6 were not inspected.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents. They also met the chairman of the Board of Governors.

In April and May 2002, HM Inspectors also carried out an inspection of the care and welfare of residential pupils at Ardvreck School. The report of that inspection is published separately at the same time as this report.

2. The school

Ardvreck School is a co-educational preparatory school for boarding and day pupils, incorporating pre-preparatory and nursery stages. At the time of the inspection the roll was 164, with an additional 16 in the nursery class.

Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were generally very happy with the work of the school.

All or almost all thought that:

- their children enjoyed school and were treated fairly there;
- school reports gave them helpful information about their child's progress;
- staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children and welcomed parents to the school;
- the school dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour and would act if a parent raised a matter of concern; and
- the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community.

About a quarter of those who responded felt that the school could do more to explain its work to them.

Ethos

The ethos in the school was very good. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming. Staff generally set appropriately high expectations for pupils' behaviour and performance. They made effective use of praise to reward effort, achievement and good behaviour. Pupils took a pride in their school and were consistently polite and friendly towards adults. A very wide range of

extra-curricular activities contributed to the development of pupils' wider interests. Pupils had been very successful in a number of sporting competitions. Regular assemblies provided very good opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating pupils' achievements.

School and community

The school had established good links with parents, other independent schools and the wider community. Notable features included:

- regular opportunities for parents to discuss their children's progress and to see the work of the school;
- prompt responses to parents' enquiries;
- a very supportive Board of Governors;
- successful participation in a range of sporting and musical competitions; and
- a good range of visits and excursions to the countryside.

Reports to parents did not always show the next steps to be taken in pupils' learning. The school had not provided parents with a handbook which clearly described its work.

Accommodation

The overall quality of accommodation and facilities was good. The modern accommodation for music was very well furnished. There were attractive and stimulating displays of pupils' work in a number of classrooms. Most rooms were of a good size, but some were too small for the number of pupils using them. Better chairs were required in the computer room.

Staffing and resources

The school was very well staffed. Visiting music instructors provided valuable specialist teaching. Ancillary staff, including overseas students taking a break

in their studies, made very helpful contributions to the life of the school.

The provision of resources, including equipment for information and communications technology (ICT), was generally good. There were some shortages in the resources for music. The range of reading materials, especially fiction, was too limited in classrooms and the library. Resources were well-organised and easily accessed. The headteacher managed finances effectively. Spending decisions were well-chosen in order to improve provision.

3. How well are pupils performing?

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Almost all pupils coped well with their classwork, although the more able were not always sufficiently challenged. Pupils in the pre-preparatory class made very good progress in developing their skills in reading and writing. Pupils at all stages listened carefully to instructions and explanations, and talked well in group and class discussions. Almost all read widely for enjoyment and information, and had a good understanding of what they read. Almost all pupils produced good poems and stories. They were less able to express their ideas in personal writing, owing to insufficient practice. Almost all used spelling and punctuation accurately for their age and stage. Almost all pupils across the stages achieved appropriate national levels of attainment in most aspects of *listening, talking, reading* and *writing* and some exceeded these levels. The results of pupils' performance in English in the Common Entrance examination in the last two years had been consistent and compared favourably with their performance in other subjects.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Most pupils were performing well in their

classwork. In information handling most could draw and interpret a range of graphs and charts accurately. Pupils made good progress in number, money and measurement from the pre-preparatory class onwards. Skills in mental and written calculation were generally well developed at all stages. By Form 4 most pupils could perform decimal calculations accurately. Some did not have a good understanding of metric units of measurement. Knowledge and understanding of shape, position and movement was well developed at all stages. Pupils tackled *problem solving and enquiry* activities enthusiastically, but their knowledge of strategies for solving problems was too limited. Overall, most pupils were reaching or exceeding appropriate national levels of attainment in *number, money and measurement, shape, position and movement* and in *information handling*. Over the last two years, pupils had tended to do less well in mathematics in Common Entrance examinations than in their other subjects.

French

In French the overall quality of attainment was very good. Pupils had very good listening skills, carefully developed through very good exposure to the language in class. At the later stages pupils spoke confidently, and were able to engage in accurate role play. Reading was very well developed. Older pupils read demanding pieces of French with good success, demonstrating clearly that they understood the content. From the early stages writing was well developed.

Music

The overall quality of attainment in class music was fair. Although some pupils were able to sing confidently, standards in classwork were generally too low. Seven-year-old pupils in Form 1 could understand simple musical notation. By Form 2 pupils could create short musical patterns using tuned percussion instruments. The quality of singing by the nine and ten-year-olds in Forms 3 and 4 was very variable, and pupils' skills in performing in class were generally too low. For pupils who received additional instrumental lessons standards in performing were generally good, and at times very good.

Information and communications technology

The overall quality of attainment in ICT was good. Standards in classwork were good and sometimes very good. At all stages, pupils were developing appropriate ICT skills to support their learning in English and mathematics. Pupils in the pre-preparatory class had developed good mouse control and used software programmes confidently to improve their number skills. By Form 1, pupils could use a range of word processing features. Pupils in Forms 2 and 3 had developed good keyboard skills. In Form 4, pupils could create and edit documents with text and graphics. They made good use of spreadsheets, but had insufficient experience of using databases. Pupils made very good use of desktop publishing to write and illustrate newspaper articles.

4. How good is the curriculum?

The overall quality of the curriculum was very good. It provided pupils with a broad range of experiences. French was taught from Form 2 and Latin from Form 3. Almost all teaching was done by a class teacher in the nursery, pre-preparatory and Form 1 classes. Subject specialist teachers taught all classes from Form 2 upwards. Art and design was introduced as a specialist subject from Form 1. ICT was taught from Form 2 and effectively used to support pupils' learning in English and mathematics. Good emphasis was placed on practising and playing musical instruments. All pupils participated in sporting activities each day. The school also made available a wide range of recreational activities at weekends and in the evening.

English language

The programme for English language was fair. Individual teachers provided generally broad courses. There were, however, some inconsistencies in the programme from class to class. At some stages, pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to listen to a variety of texts, or to develop their skills in personal writing.

The school had identified the need to provide further guidance for teachers, in order to ensure that pupils' learning progressed more effectively from stage to stage.

Mathematics

The overall quality of the mathematics programme was good. It was generally broad and well balanced, and gave good attention to most key aspects. It did not give sufficient attention to practical activities, including measurement, or to the systematic development of skills in problem solving.

French

The programme for French was good. It gave appropriate attention to developing a sound grammatical base. There was a need for more opportunities for developing extended speaking skills.

Music

The programme for class music had important weaknesses. It did not give sufficient emphasis to developing pupils' musical skills, particularly in performing with instruments or in singing. Staff had not yet identified appropriate standards of attainment for pupils to achieve. Most of the activities provided in class were insufficiently challenging to meet pupils' needs. Courses for pupils who had additional instrumental lessons were good. They enabled pupils to make good progress on their chosen instruments. There was now a need to make appropriate links between the class music course and the additional instrumental programmes.

Information and communications technology

The school's programme for ICT was good. Individual teachers provided pupils with very good opportunities to use computers to develop word processing skills for creating and presenting text and graphics. Contexts for using ICT were well chosen and pupils found activities enjoyable and challenging. There was a need to identify more clearly appropriate skills to ensure that pupils' learning progressed from stage to stage.

5. How good is learning and teaching?

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. Most of the lessons seen were good or very good. Some were fair. There were no major weaknesses in any lessons. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

- Teachers provided clear explanations, used questioning very well and for the most part taught at a brisk pace.
- Pupils were generally very conscientious and worked well on the tasks set. They had good opportunities to exercise independence within well-organised classroom routines.
- In most classes teachers effectively matched learning activities to pupils' needs.
- Teachers' plans did not show sufficiently clearly what pupils were expected to learn.

Assessment and recording procedures were well developed in some subjects. In others they required to be more closely matched to teachers' plans. Insufficient use was made of assessment information to inform learning and teaching. The overall quality of assessment procedures was fair.

6. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare

Staff knew their pupils very well and were sensitive to their needs. A child protection policy was issued at the end of the inspection. A policy on health and safety was in preparation.

Personal and social development Staff made good provision for pupils' personal and social development through classroom activities, school visits and residential trips. Pupils were encouraged to take part in a wide range of sporting and musical activities. Staff had achieved considerable success in promoting appropriate behaviour and developing pupils' self-esteem. The health education programme paid generally good attention to aspects of personal safety, hygiene and healthy living. However, insufficient emphasis was placed on drugs education and sex education. There was no coherent programme in place to ensure pupils developed knowledge, skills and informed attitudes systematically from stage to stage.

Support for learning Arrangements for support for learning were good overall. Class teachers, students and the support for learning teacher together provided good support for pupils who needed extra help. The school had recently created individualised educational programmes for some pupils. Staff liaised informally to meet pupils' needs. However, they did not plan together systematically to ensure consistency between the work done with the support for learning teacher and that done in class.

7. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership The headmaster, who took up his post in January 2000, was highly committed to the school and very hard-working. Significant effort had been devoted to the remit from the Board of Governors to restore viability to the school, with considerable success. The number of boarders had increased by a quarter, and the financial position had been strengthened. Very good relationships had been established with staff, pupils and parents. A number of staff had been re-deployed to build on their strengths. Senior classes had been re-arranged in order to meet pupils' needs more effectively. Some aspects of the accommodation had been improved. It was now time to put in place clearer management to ensure that stronger

quality assurance, better curriculum development and more effective staff development contributed to further improvement in pupils' experiences.

The deputy head and the director of studies had few management responsibilities in their remits.

The school's mission statement provided a broad overview of the experience the school offered. However, it did not provide a sharply focused set of aims against which to evaluate the work of the school. There was a need to consider how to involve staff, pupils and parents in revising and preparing aims, rules, procedures and key policies.

Staff development and review

The headteacher had held discussions with staff about their work in the previous session. The information from these discussions had not yet been used systematically to identify staff development needs. The school had no policy for staff development and review. A number of staff had attended staff development in specialist subject areas. The information gained from these had not been shared widely amongst staff. Staff had not had recent training on child protection and related issues. Arrangements for supporting probationary teaching staff were unsatisfactory.

School development planning

A whole school analysis of strengths and weaknesses had been undertaken and staff views sought in 2000. While weaknesses had been identified, no action taken had been recorded. Although the headmaster had requested senior staff to provide lists of their priorities by December 2001, these lists had not been discussed or prioritised. Staff had not yet been involved in drawing up and implementing a development plan which included clear targets for improving the work of the school.

Approaches to improving quality

Senior staff carefully monitored pupils' achievements in Common Entrance examinations and reviewed pupils' marks at each half term. The headteacher had an

informal overview of aspects of the work of the school. There were, however, no systematic procedures in place through which senior staff regularly monitored and evaluated the quality of the school's provision. Overall, quality assurance procedures had important weaknesses.

8. How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the school provided a good standard of education and its pupils achieved well. It gave pupils opportunities to broaden their horizons through the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. In order to sustain its good results and improve its provision the school needed to clarify its policies and procedures and develop robust procedures for quality assurance.

Key strengths

- Confident, polite and well-behaved pupils who supported each other well.
- Caring and committed staff.
- The school's sports hall, music centre and outdoor facilities.
- A wide range of sporting and extra-curricular activities.
- The provision of staff.

Main points for action

The school and the Board of Governors should act on the following recommendations.

- The school should improve the programmes of study as identified in this report. In particular, programmes should ensure progression and continuity from stage to stage.
- A clear staff management and development framework should be written and implemented in the

school. It should include a development plan, and arrangements for monitoring and evaluating provision and for staff development and review. In particular, arrangements for supporting probationary teaching staff should be improved.

- All policies, procedures and information relevant to the school should be clarified and made available to staff, pupils and parents as appropriate.
- The remits of the deputy head and director of studies should be reviewed with a view to their carrying more management responsibilities.
- Training for staff should be improved and, in particular, training in child protection should be provided for all staff.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and Board of Governors have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Duncan MacQuarrie
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Independent Schools

10 December 2002

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- The school's ethos
- Provision of staff
- The structure of the curriculum

We judged the following to be *good*

- Communication with parents
- Partnership with parents and the Board of Governors
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Provision of materials and equipment
- Quality of courses or programmes
- Quality of the teaching process
- Quality of pupils' learning
- Matching the teaching process to pupils' needs and experience
- Effectiveness of the learning support
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Quality of teachers' planning
- Using assessment to guide the teaching process
- Effectiveness of promoted staff
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 22% of cases, good in 64% and fair in 14%. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headmaster and school staff, the Board of Governors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the office at the address below or by telephoning 0131 244 8298. Copies are also available on our web site: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Dr Gill Robinson, HMCI whose address is given below. If you are still dissatisfied with our services, you can contact your member of the Scottish Parliament (or, if you prefer, any other MSP) and ask for your complaint to be passed to the Scottish Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. He will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, he will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right first if we can.

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