

**Armadale Primary School
and Nursery Class
West Lothian Council
4 March 2008**

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1. Background

Armadale Primary School and Nursery Class were 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 representatives of the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council, representatives of the parent council and a group of parents¹.

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

The school serves the town of Armadale. At the time of the inspection the roll was 383, including 68 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was well below the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The quality of direct whole class teaching.
- Effective contributions made by staff to the care and welfare of all pupils.
- Partnerships with parents.
- Staff's commitment to inclusion and the work of the nurture group.

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.

Parents, pupils and staff were very pleased with almost all aspects of the work of the school and of the nursery class. A few parents of children in the nursery class would welcome more information on their children's progress and the work of the nursery.

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

Most parents of pupils in the school believed that the school had a good reputation in the community. They all felt well informed about their children's learning and how to help with homework. They believed the school encouraged their children to give of their best and that staff set high expectations for pupils' attainment. The majority of parents felt that the school dealt well with inappropriate behaviour. Parents were confident that the school was well led. Pupils were very proud of their school and believed that teachers expected them to work hard. They said that teachers explained things clearly, helped them to improve their work and praised them when they had done something well. However, almost half were concerned about the behaviour of a few pupils. Staff were very pleased with all aspects of the work of the school. They felt well supported by the strong sense of teamwork. They said that senior managers worked well as a team and that the school was well led.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Overall, the quality of the curriculum was good. Children in the nursery class and pupils in the school benefited from a broad range of learning experiences across a balanced curriculum. The school effectively used additional time to support pupils' learning in English language and mathematics and to provide daily physical exercise sessions for pupils in P1 to P3. Teachers put a strong focus on developing pupils' enterprise and personal and social skills. The school had gained a gold award for enterprise education. Pupils from P1 to P7 learned French and by P7 most were making sufficient progress. The school made good use of specialist teachers to extend pupils' learning experiences in music and physical education. Pupils benefited from two hours of quality physical education (PE) per week, in line with national recommendations. At the early stages, additional time was allocated to structured play sessions but these sessions did not yet sufficiently support and extend pupils' learning. Teachers were increasingly using interactive white board technology well to enhance lessons across the curriculum. The overall quality of teaching was good, with examples of high quality teaching at a few stages. Teachers made very effective use of direct teaching in whole class lessons. They consistently shared learning intentions with pupils and explained things clearly. However, teaching approaches lacked variety with insufficient use of group work. The quality of interactive teaching was variable across the school. A few teachers skilfully used questioning to engage pupils and to encourage them to think more deeply. In the nursery, staff needed to make more effective use of questioning to challenge children's thinking. Overall, praise was used well to build pupils' confidence and to encourage participation in lessons. Most teachers provided clear feedback to pupils on how to improve their writing, but this was not consistent practice across other curricular areas. Homework was well planned and helped to support pupils' learning.

Overall, the quality of learning was adequate. In the nursery, children expressed themselves well when acting out roles in the home area and shop. However, they needed more opportunities to express their individual creativity. Children used programmes on the computer to solve simple problems. Low level displays provided good opportunities for children to explore and investigate using their senses. Children were gaining confidence and developing physical skills through a range of activities. All children were gaining good control of their hands and fingers. In all areas of the

curriculum, some children were not sufficiently challenged to ensure their continued progression in their learning. Within the primary stages, staff had successfully created a calm and purposeful learning environment. The majority of pupils settled well to activities but a few pupils required close supervision to ensure that they were on task. Pupils were beginning to evaluate their own work and the work of others through a range of peer and self-assessment strategies. They were at the early stages of discussing how to improve the quality of their work and identify their next steps in learning. Pupils were clear about their levels of attainment. Overall, the pace of lessons was too slow. Learning activities were not always sufficiently challenging for more able pupils. In a few classes additional 'fast finisher' worksheets were often unrelated to the lesson and did not support or extend learning. In a few classes, pupils used effective strategies, such as conferencing, to support them through difficult work. Pupils were not given enough responsibility for working independently on tasks and their collaborative skills were not yet sufficiently developed.

The school had taken a range of positive steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Children in the nursery class were developing an awareness of the needs of others and most were able to share resources and take turns. Older children were becoming independent in their learning and successfully made plans and took decisions. Most pupils demonstrated good awareness of their responsibilities to themselves and to one another. They developed effective citizenship skills by taking responsibility for specific duties in class and around the school. These included acting as classroom and dining room monitors, buddies and serving on the pupil council, eco and health committees. Pupils successfully fulfilled these roles and were proud of the help they gave to others. The school had achieved its second Eco School green flag. A few pupils from P5 to P7 were making good progress in learning to play a musical instrument. Pupils at P3, P6 and P7 extended their personal and social skills through the rich learning experiences provided in the annual residential events for these stages.

English language

Overall, children in the nursery class were making good progress in communication and language. Children used books to enjoy stories and to find information. Most listened well and were able to follow instructions. Some children were starting to blend the sounds of familiar letters. Most children were able to use language confidently for a range of purposes. They enjoyed mark making in the writing area and some were able to write their own name. Across the primary school, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. The school had made some progress in improving pupils' levels of attainment over the last two years. The majority of pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in reading and writing. At P2, a few pupils had achieved these levels earlier than would normally be expected. Pupils were very well supported in their learning and were making good progress with their class work. At the early stages, pupils were making good progress in developing early language skills. Pupils at all stages listened attentively to their teacher for information and instructions and to stories. Most pupils, particularly at P7 confidently expressed their views. At the middle and upper stages, pupils contributed well to small group and class discussions. Most pupils enjoyed reading and read with confidence. In the upper stages, they could describe the key features of different types of books and most showed good knowledge of language. Almost all pupils across the stages were making good progress in developing the quality and quantity of their writing. They showed good understanding of punctuation and grammar and took pride in their work

Mathematics

Children in the nursery class were making good progress in developing early mathematical skills. Most children were able to count and recognise numbers. Some children were able to sort and match objects by size, colour and shape. Children's interest in mathematics and their developing knowledge of mathematical concepts needed to be encouraged by staff in a wider range of activities across the nursery. At the primary stages, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. Over the last three years, attainment in mathematics had improved. Most pupils at the early stages and by P7 had achieved appropriate national levels. A majority of pupils at the middle stages had attained these levels. A few pupils at all stages were capable of achieving higher standards. Pupils not attaining appropriate national levels were making steady progress with class work. Pupils at P1 had made a good start to the development of early mathematical skills. At all stages pupils were confident in handling data and in designing and carrying out their own surveys. Most pupils across the school were quick and accurate in their mental calculations. From P3, pupils had a sound grasp of basic number and of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Pupils at P3 had a secure understanding of money. Pupils at all stages showed a good understanding of two- and three-dimensional shape. By P7, pupils were not sufficiently secure in their understanding of percentages. At all stages, pupils were involved in problem solving activities and were developing a range of strategies but required more opportunities to solve problems.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

The school's approaches for meeting pupils' learning needs were good overall with some aspects of very good practice. In the nursery, staff observed children and noted their responses to play activities. Generally staff made good use of the information gathered to plan for children's next steps in learning. At the primary stages, class teachers chose a good range of activities and approaches to support learners. They did not always, however, challenge all pupils consistently enough by providing activities suitably matched to their needs. Class teachers worked very well with support assistants who provided a high quality level of support for pupils in class. About a quarter of pupils required additional support for learning. The two learning support teachers worked very well with pupils who had additional learning needs and supported them to make good progress. The school's nurture group gave very good support to the most vulnerable pupils including those pupils who were looked after and accommodated. This included, for example, very good development of literacy and social skills at the P1 stage as needed. Pupils were very well supported during transitions from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Armadale Academy. At the early stages, teachers were building very effectively on pupils' prior learning experiences in nursery. Staff used plans such as individualised educational programmes, multi-agency support plans and co-ordinated support plans to record pupils' needs and identify next steps for learning. These were not always, however, being used effectively to track pupils' progress. The school was aware of the need to further improve the overall coordination and leadership for meeting pupils' learning needs and this was being addressed by the deputy headteacher.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The quality of pastoral care was very good. Nursery staff provided children with very good care that was appropriate to their age, ability and confidence. All staff throughout the school and nursery were aware of their responsibilities for protecting children and keeping them safe. The school had well established procedures for ensuring the care, welfare and protection of pupils. Staff knew pupils very well and responded sensitively to their social and emotional needs. Pupils' attendance was closely monitored and absences followed up. Staff effectively implemented the school's approaches to dealing with any incidents of bullying or racism. Pupils for whom English is an additional language were well supported. Staff dealt well with concerns raised by pupils. The school positively promoted a healthy lifestyle through a variety of approaches, such as, healthy tuckshop, breakfast club, kids in the kitchen and a physical activity initiative 'Kids off the couch'. The school had efficient procedures for the administration and management of medication. The school was well supported by a wide range of education authority services.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was good. Areas of the school had recently been refurbished and provided a spacious and attractive learning environment. Appropriate security measures were in place. The school was accessible for all users. Classrooms were well organised and pupils' work and achievements were displayed well. The gym hall provided very good space for physical education and was also used as a dining area. Open areas and two additional classrooms provided good space for assemblies, drama, play and a school library. School grounds were attractive and provided a large play area for pupils. The control of traffic around the school was an ongoing safety issue which required immediate attention.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Staff in the nursery had created an environment where all children and parents were made to feel welcome. All children were treated equally and with equal concern. Staff praised children appropriately to acknowledge their efforts and achievements and to build self-esteem. The school provided a very caring and supportive environment for pupils based on a strong sense of inclusion. Staff took care to include vulnerable pupils fully in the life of the school. Staff had created a climate of trust and respect throughout the school. Relationships between and among staff and pupils were positive and they shared a strong sense of pride in the school. Almost all pupils were polite and courteous to staff and behaviour in the school had significantly improved over the last two years. Pupils responded positively to the range of positive behaviour management strategies and to the high expectations set for behaviour. However, some teachers did not always make sufficiently clear to pupils the quality of work expected or set appropriately high standards. Pupils' successes were well celebrated. The school had a strong sense of equality and fairness, and staff positively promoted racial, cultural and religious diversity through the curriculum and in the day-to-day life of the school. The weekly assembly provided suitable opportunities for religious observance.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had strong and effective links with almost all parents and with the newly formed Parents' Council. In the nursery, parents were encouraged to become involved in their children's learning through staff led initiatives such as parent workshops. The school's standards and quality report and regular newsletters were of a high standard and provided good information to parents on the work of the school. A range of curriculum workshops and open afternoons had successfully raised parents' awareness of the school curriculum and, in particular, how it ensured pupils' health and well being. Parents were consulted on sensitive aspects of the health education programme and were suitably involved in reviewing the work of the school. Pupils' end of year progress reports provided good information for parents. Parents were involved in their children's learning through regular and varied homework. There were strong links with other local schools and the local community. Pupils participated in a range of local events such as carol singing and the local gala. Parents and members of the local community were invited to the weekly assembly and other school events such as 'Burns showcase' to celebrate pupils' achievements.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Armadale Primary School provided high quality pastoral care for pupils. There was a strong sense of inclusion and all pupils, and in particular the most vulnerable, were given good support. Staff had successfully improved standards of behaviour over the past two years. The quality of direct teaching across the school was consistently high. Attainment in English language and mathematics was good, but more able pupils were capable of achieving more. Pupils with additional support needs were effectively supported and were making appropriate progress in their learning. A few pupils at all stages were capable of more challenging work and a greater pace in their learning.

The headteacher had been in post for twenty months and in that time had gained the confidence of staff, pupils and parents. She had set out a clear vision for the school and had appropriately focused on improving the culture for learning. The headteacher had established positive working relationships with staff and had effectively managed significant staff changes over her short time in post. Together, with the deputy headteacher and principal teacher, she had created a positive and supportive climate for staff and pupils. The deputy headteacher and principal teacher provided effective support to newly qualified teachers and offered advice to staff. The deputy headteacher had been in post for eleven months. She had established effective links with other agencies. However, she had yet to provide a sufficiently strong lead in learning and

teaching and in developing key areas within her remit. The school used a range of appropriate methods for self-evaluation, including monitoring teachers' plans, pupils' work and observing lessons. However, procedures were not implemented rigorously enough and had not impacted sufficiently on classroom practice or pupils' learning experiences. Systems for tracking pupils' progress were not effectively used to ensure that all pupils achieved well. Staff participated in school audits and had been involved in agreeing priorities for improvement in the current session. Working parties were addressing identified key areas to bring about improvement.

At the last Care Commission inspection there were three requirements and one recommendation which had all now been successfully actioned.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should continue to improve the quality of education. In particular they should:

- address issues of pace and challenge in order to meet the needs of all pupils, including the more able;
- improve the quality of learning experiences by actively involving pupils in their own learning;
- strengthen approaches to self-evaluation for improvement, including implementing approaches to monitoring and tracking pupils' progress more rigorously; and
- improve distributive leadership across the school.

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.

Belinda Sheehan
HM Inspector

4 March 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	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
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	very good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	good
Leadership across the school	weak
Self-evaluation	adequate

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"> • Provided detailed information on their children’s progress and on the work of the school. • Explained well to parents how to help with homework. • Staff encouraged pupils to give of their best. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal more effectively with inappropriate behaviour. • Improve the school’s reputation in the local community.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff knew them well and praised them for their achievements. • Teachers explained things clearly and helped them with difficult work. • The school helped them to stay safe and healthy. • Teachers expected them to work hard and checked their homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the behaviour of a few pupils. • Deal more effectively with bullies.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were very pleased with all aspects of the work of the school. 	<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 and Cultural Services, 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, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA or by telephoning 01506 600200. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, HMCI, at the above address.

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management Unit, 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.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsso.org.uk.

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