

**Achiltibuie Primary School
The Highland Council
29 August 2006**

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1. Background

Achiltibuie Primary School was inspected in May 2006 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, 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 and a group of parents¹.

The school serves the Coigach peninsula in north-west Ross and Cromarty. At the time of the inspection the roll was 27. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' attainment in mathematics and the quality of their learning experiences in French, music, art and science.
- The school's progress in promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Pupils' behaviour and the high standard of pastoral care.
- Partnership arrangements with parents and the community.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents, teachers, staff and pupils were very satisfied with all aspects of the school's work. They all agreed that the school was well led and had a very good reputation in the community. Parents felt welcome in the school. They stated that teachers were good at letting them know about their children's strengths and weaknesses in learning. Pupils were proud of their school and enjoyed being there. They felt that they had frequent

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

opportunities to offer views and make suggestions through the pupil council. Pupils enjoyed being at school. They agreed that teachers explained things clearly, helped them with difficulties and praised them when they did something well. Staff were proud of their school and felt that they worked well as a team. They thought that standards for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided pupils with a broad and improving curriculum. Teachers had recently developed the programmes for English language and aspects of environmental studies to ensure greater continuity and progression in the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. The programmes for citizenship, enterprise education and religious and moral education needed to be improved further. The specialist art and craft teacher provided pupils with a range of high quality art and design activities. Pupils' skills in spoken French were very well developed in each class. The quality of teaching was good. Teachers were well organised, gave clear explanations and made good use of questioning to check and reinforce pupils' understanding. They discussed with pupils what they were expected to learn and encouraged them to set personal learning targets, particularly in the P1-3 class. Teachers were making increased use of computers and digital cameras to develop pupils' skills in information and communications technology. The quality of teachers' planning was not consistent and teachers did not always make effective use of assessment information to monitor and track pupils' progress. Teachers provided pupils with a varied range of appropriate homework activities.

The overall quality of pupils' learning was good. In some areas of the curriculum such as the expressive arts, it was very good. Pupils in each class were well motivated and were able to work independently with the minimum of supervision. They had positive attitudes to learning and their skills in working together were well developed. They had effective opportunities to work together in a range of practical learning situations such as problem solving, science and technology activities. Commendably almost all pupils were learning to play a range of musical instruments, including the guitar, chanter, tin whistle and accordion. Pupils' skills in using computers to support their learning were well developed. The quality of most pupils' handwriting and their presentation of work was good.

Pupils played an active role in all aspects of school life. They were fully involved in the decision making process and all pupils in the P4-7 class were members of the very successful pupil council. Teachers had started to develop pupils' understanding of enterprise education and pupils had been actively involved in planning and organising activities such as school performances and concerts. All pupils took part enthusiastically in school events, including the annual pantomime, art exhibition and musical concerts. Pupils had a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and the need for a healthy lifestyle. Pupils in the P4-7 class carried out a wide range of helpful activities around the school, including working with younger pupils. All pupils were actively involved in a range of out-of-school activities such as chess, cross-country running and instrumental tuition. The school made very good use of its minibus to broaden pupils' learning experiences through field trips, outings and visits to the sports centre in Ullapool.

English language

The quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. In recent years, almost all pupils had achieved the appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. A significant number of pupils had achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils in both classes were making good progress in their coursework. Their talking and listening skills were well developed. Pupils listened attentively, talked with confidence and expressed their views and opinions clearly. They could read with fluency and understanding and made effective use of a wide range of reading material in the school and the local community centre library. Pupils' writing skills were good and they produced some very good pieces of extended writing. Pupils' skills in punctuation, spelling and grammar were good but there was scope for further improvement in the P4-7 class.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was very good. In recent years, the level of pupils' attainment in mathematics had been consistently high. Almost all pupils were achieving the appropriate national levels in mathematics and a number of pupils in each class achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils were making very good progress in their coursework. Those who experienced difficulties with aspects of mathematics were very well supported by staff and were making good progress in their learning. Pupils could handle information confidently to create a range of graphs and charts. Their skills in written number work and mental calculation were very well developed. They were able to apply their knowledge of mathematics in a variety of practical contexts and made good use of equipment to measure volume, weight and length. They had a very good understanding of the properties of shape. Pupils in the P4-7 class were able to apply their knowledge of position and movement in learning contexts such as map reading. Pupils could identify and apply a range of problem solving strategies.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school's procedures to ensure the care, welfare and protection of pupils were very good. The caring staff were very sensitive to the emotional, physical and social needs of individual pupils. All staff had a firm understanding of the school's child protection procedures. They were familiar with education authority policies on substance misuse and the administration of medicine. Pupils could describe the school's procedures for dealing with instances of bullying and knew what to do if they had any concerns.

Staff worked as an effective team to ensure that the learning needs of pupils were met effectively. Pupils in each class were very well supported by teaching staff and the part-time classroom assistant. Staff provided pupils with a very good level of support when they experienced difficulties with aspects of their learning. The school had effective arrangements in place to support pupils transferring from nursery into P1. The headteacher had worked with Ullapool High School and local primary schools to develop a successful induction programme and ensure a very effective transition from P7 into secondary school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good. Building security arrangements were appropriate and a secure entrance system had recently been installed. The school was well maintained. The additional teaching area and adjacent community centre were used effectively by staff for instrumental tuition, drama, physical education, assemblies and out of school activities. Staff had produced attractive displays of pupils' work. The building was suitable for users with restricted mobility. The education authority and school should carry out a risk assessment of the fencing around the perimeter of the playground area.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Staff, pupils and parents were very proud of their school. There was a strong sense of community and the interaction between staff and the quality of relationships between staff and pupils was very good. Pupils were polite, courteous and very well behaved. Teachers had high expectations of pupils' attainment, achievement and behaviour. They had not yet reviewed the ways in which they could increase pupils' understanding of racial equality and discrimination. Staff, pupils and parents regularly raised money for a number of charities. The headteacher and staff made good use of assemblies to highlight pupils' achievements and promote appropriately frequent religious observance.
Partnership with parents and the community	The headteacher had formed very good relationships with parents and the School Board. The school had strong and productive links with the local community. Parents were actively involved in the life of the school and provided support in a wide variety of ways. These included taking part in field trips, out of school activities and accompanying staff and pupils to Ullapool sports centre. Teachers held two meeting with parents each year to discuss children's progress. Pupils set their own learning targets and had been involved in writing their own end of year reports. The quality and content of written progress reports was variable. The school had consulted with parents on sensitive aspects of the health education programme.

7. Improving the school

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

The school provided pupils with a good standard of education within a caring and purposeful learning environment. Pupils' attainment was very good in mathematics and good in English language. Teachers provided pupils with good learning experiences, particularly in mathematics, French, music, art and science. The quality of teaching was consistently good and the pace of learning was appropriate for all learners. The quality of teachers' planning was not consistent and staff did not always make sufficient use of assessment information to monitor and track pupils' progress.

The school had the clear capacity to ensure ongoing improvement. The experienced headteacher had been in post for 19 years. He was held in very high regard by staff, pupils, parents and the wider community. In addition to his extensive teaching commitments, he carried out his management duties effectively. He had established a caring and purposeful learning environment within the school and had worked closely with staff to create a strong sense of teamwork. The headteacher used a variety of informal strategies to evaluate the work of the school and monitor the quality of learning and teaching. Staff were actively involved in the process of self-evaluation and made good use of quality indicators developed nationally to identify areas for improvement. However, there was a need to establish more effective systems to monitor learning and teaching and evaluate all aspects of the school's work. Although the school improvement plan lacked detail, a range of appropriate curriculum development activities were taking place in the school.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take account of the need to:

- continue to develop the curriculum to ensure appropriate breadth and balance across all subject areas;
- improve planning and assessment procedures;
- carry out a risk assessment of the playground and act on the findings; and
- improve the systems to monitor the quality of learning and teaching and evaluate the work of 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.

Michael Wood
HM Inspector

29 August 2006

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	Adequate
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Good
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Very Good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Very Good
Meeting pupils' needs	Good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	Good
Climate and relationships	Very Good
Expectations and promoting achievement	Very good
Equality and fairness	Good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	Very Good

Improving the school	
Leadership	Good
Self-evaluation	Adequate

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	excellent
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents were very satisfied with all aspects of school life.	<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">• Pupils were very satisfied with all aspects of school life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant issues.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, Culture & Sport, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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If you 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. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

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