

**Applegrove Primary School  
Forres  
The Moray Council  
7 March 2006**

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## 1. Background

Applegrove Primary School was inspected in November 2005 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, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

The school serves an area of south and central Forres. At the time of the inspection the roll was 394. A varying number of pupils with additional support needs worked for part of each week in a support base in the school. The base, which also included pupils from outwith the school's normal catchment area, made provision for pupils whose needs arose from more complex learning difficulties. 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.

- A broad curriculum which promoted a wide range of pupils' achievements.
- Pupils' motivation to learn, and their standards of behaviour and politeness.
- Arrangements to include pupils with additional support needs arising from complex learning difficulties within the work of the school.
- Commitment of staff to the school and their care for pupils.
- The leadership of the headteacher.

## 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.

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

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about the school's work. Parents felt that their children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly while there. They were confident that the school would deal effectively with any concerns they might have. Parents thought that the school had a good reputation in the community and was well led. Pupils felt safe and well looked after in school. They thought that teachers helped them when they were having difficulties with their school work and listened to their views. Staff were positive about all aspects of the school's work. They enjoyed working in the school and felt there was mutual respect between staff and pupils. Staff thought that pupils were keen to learn and that the school was well led.

#### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

##### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The structure of the school's curriculum was very good. Teachers used allocated time effectively and flexibly to provide pupils with a broad and balanced range of activities. These ensured that pupils developed an appropriate range of knowledge and skills as they progressed from stage to stage. Pupils were developing self-confidence and problem solving skills through their work in enterprise education. Teachers used praise effectively and gave clear explanations. They used homework well and most questioned pupils effectively to check their understanding. There were some examples of very good teaching. In these, teachers shared with pupils what they wanted them to learn and used an effective range of teaching approaches.

Pupils at all stages responded enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and were very well motivated. They worked well without supervision and were keen to answer teachers' questions. In a few lessons, the pace of work was too slow and tasks set lacked appropriate challenge. Pupils were developing effective skills in working together on a range of appropriate activities. These included singing and making music, working in groups in physical education and performing brief plays in drama. At all stages, pupils' skills in using information and communications technology were developing well. Pupils used computers effectively for research and P7 pupils used computers to draw graphs as part of their work in environmental studies.

School staff effectively promoted pupils' personal and social development through a broad range of well planned activities. These included baking and riding activities for pupils who worked within the support base. A few pupils at all stages were developing their awareness of good citizenship through their participation in the school council. The senior school choir performed successfully at a range of local venues and had raised funds to help families in Africa. Throughout the school, pupils were learning to care for others through a range of fund-raising activities. Around fifty pupils were learning useful skills in aspects of science and technology through participating in the school's gardening club. The school had recently won a national award as a result of staff's successful promotion of pupils' gardening skills. The school was currently making progress towards achieving the Eco School bronze award for their work in promoting environmental issues. Staff used classroom discussions and studies of other cultures to prepare pupils well for life in a multi-ethnic society. Pupils achieved well in a range of sporting activities, including badminton and cross country running. They

had a good knowledge of the importance of a healthy diet and the dangers of substance misuse. Pupils had an appropriate understanding of personal relationships.

### **English language**

Attainment in English language was good overall and had remained steady in recent years. Attainment in writing had improved recently. Most pupils were achieving or exceeding appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Those with additional support needs were making good progress in their class work. At all stages, most pupils listened attentively to instructions and directions and responded well to stories. Almost all pupils could confidently express their ideas, thoughts and feelings in discussion, and they respected each other's opinions. Most read with appropriate fluency and understood what they had read. Their skills in reading for information were developing well and they made effective use of the school's well organised libraries. For a few more able pupils the pace of progress in reading was too slow. Throughout the school, most pupils showed high standards of neatness and presentation in their written work. They wrote well for a variety of purposes, including report writing and imaginative stories.

### **Mathematics**

Attainment in mathematics was good and had remained steady in recent years. Almost all pupils at the early stages, and most at the middle and upper stages, were attaining or exceeding appropriate national levels. For a few more able pupils the pace of progress was too slow. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress in the tasks set for them. Throughout the school, most pupils interpreted graphs appropriately and a few pupils at the upper stages had made effective use of spreadsheets. Most pupils at all stages performed written and mental calculations well. A few pupils were not sufficiently quick and accurate in their mental calculations. At the upper stages, pupils had a good understanding of decimal fractions. Throughout the school, almost all pupils had an appropriate understanding of the properties of shapes. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry were developing well. At all stages, pupils were appropriately aware of strategies they could use to solve a range of mathematical problems.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The quality of pastoral care was very good. All staff were very caring and strongly committed to ensuring pupils' well being. Pupils responded effectively by showing care and concern for each other. During break times, a few upper stages pupils assisted younger pupils within the early stages playground. The school had an appropriate range of helpful welfare policies and procedures to guide staff, and staff implemented them well. These included guidance on child protection, racial discrimination, anti-bullying, and safe use of the Internet.

Pupils were well supported in their class work by a range of staff, including support for learning teachers, classroom assistants and auxiliaries. These staff carried out a range of tasks effectively with individual pupils, groups and classes, as well as providing helpful assistance to class teachers. This support helped ensure that most of the needs of pupils were well met. Pupils and families were also very well supported by two

Early Years Support Workers. They assisted pupils with their work in school and also visited families at home to help meet their needs. In this initiative, the Local Community Network had been particularly helpful. There were effective procedures to support pupils entering P1 and pupils transferring to secondary school.

The additional support needs of pupils in the support base and throughout the school were well met. Pupils with additional support needs arising from complex learning difficulties received valuable assistance within the support base and were very effectively integrated in appropriate classes. Their personal and social development was promoted through helpful group and classroom activities and valuable social interactions at break times. Staff had prepared individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils who required more extensive support in their learning. These IEPs set out both long and short term learning targets. These targets were not consistently clear and detailed enough to reflect each pupil's individual needs. The system for identifying pupils with additional support needs did not always ensure that support was targeted appropriately.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Accommodation was very good. There was ample storage space for resources, and staff displayed pupils' work effectively to create attractive teaching areas. Pupils accessed the Internet from two well equipped computer suites and from almost all classrooms. Facilities for pupils with additional support needs included a helpful sensory room, a large multi-purpose area and a dedicated classroom. The playground was spacious, and staff made effective use of garden areas within the school grounds to promote pupils' learning. The school's security arrangements and access for pupils with physical disabilities were appropriate.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	The school had a very positive and welcoming atmosphere and pupil and staff morale was high. Staff worked well together as a team and relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Almost all staff had suitably high expectations of pupils' behaviour and most had appropriate expectations of their attainment. Pupils were proud of their school and were very well behaved and polite. Those at the upper stages responded well to opportunities to exercise responsibility through assisting younger pupils. All staff treated pupils fairly and gave useful emphasis to promoting racial equality. Regular assemblies provided pupils with frequent opportunities for religious observance.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had a very effective partnership with parents and the wider community. The School Board and PTA provided helpful fund-raising assistance and support to the school's work. Pupils benefited from a range of useful links with the local community. These included links with a visiting minister, an Active Schools Co-ordinator, local businesses, other local schools and the education authority. The school kept parents well informed using regular newsletters, parents' meetings, helpful written reports on pupils' progress and informative booklets. Staff had consulted appropriately with parents about sensitive health issues.

## 7. Improving the school

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

Applegrove Primary School had many strengths. Staff worked effectively as a team to provide high quality pastoral care. They had created a caring and inclusive environment for pupils, in which they were achieving well in a range of activities. Across the school, pupils were attaining good standards in English language and mathematics. A few pupils could have made better progress if the pace of learning had been faster. Pupils with additional support needs arising from complex learning difficulties were making good progress and were included effectively in the work of the school.

The highly experienced headteacher provided very good leadership. She had a clear strategic vision for the school and had gained the trust of pupils, parents and staff. She had created an effective, caring staff team and had improved aspects of the school's work including attainment in writing. The depute headteacher with major responsibility for the early years provided very effective support to the work of the school. She provided helpful advice and support for staff at all stages and worked closely with them to promote good practice. The depute headteacher with major responsibility for P4 to P7 had been in post for just over a year. He gave useful assistance to the headteacher and was developing his role in ensuring consistent standards of learning and teaching. The very recently appointed principal teachers had made a promising start to fulfilling their wide ranging remits. As yet their work had not had time to have made a significant impact. The school had good arrangements for evaluating the quality of its provision. Teaching staff regularly discussed pupils' progress with the headteacher and depute headteachers. The school had sought parents' views on aspects of its work and consulted pupils through the school council. Senior promoted staff provided helpful written comments on teachers' plans and had visited classes to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching. These visits were not yet sufficiently frequent and systematic. Staff gathered an appropriate range of assessment information, including the results of National Assessments, to monitor pupils' progress. They did not always use this assessment information effectively to track and predict

pupils' progress. With the continuing support of the education authority, the school had the capacity for further improvement.

### **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:

- further improve arrangements for monitoring learning and teaching to build on identified good practice and track pupils' progress more effectively; and
- improve procedures for preparing and implementing individualised educational programmes for pupils with additional support needs.

### **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.

Robert Barfoot  
HM Inspector

7 March 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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
Structure of the curriculum	Very good
The teaching process	Good
Pupils' learning experiences	Good
Pupils' attainment in English language	Good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	Good

<b>How well are pupils supported?</b>	
Pastoral care	Very good
Meeting pupils' needs	Good

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

<b>Improving the school</b>	
Leadership	Very good
Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities	Good
Self-evaluation	Good

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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents were positive about almost all aspects of the school.</li> <li>• Their children enjoyed being in school and were encouraged to work hard while there.</li> <li>• Staff treated pupils fairly and set high standards for them.</li> <li>• Staff would deal effectively with any concerns raised by parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few parents stated that they did not have a clear enough view of the school's priorities for improvement.</li> </ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They enjoyed school and thought that teachers gave clear explanations.</li> <li>• Teachers told them when they had done something well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few pupils thought that the behaviour of other pupils was not good.</li> </ul>
<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<p>Staff were positive about almost all aspects of the school including the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They enjoyed working in the school and there was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> <li>• Indiscipline was dealt with effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few staff would have liked more involvement in the processes for making decisions.</li> </ul>

## **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 Educational 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, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Inverness IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### **If you wish to comment about primary inspections**

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### **Our complaints procedure**

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://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. 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](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk).

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