

**Ardgour Primary School
by Fort William
The Highland Council
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1. Background

Ardgour Primary School was inspected in June 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 village of Ardgour and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 22, including 5 children in the nursery class. 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.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' attainment in English language.
- The standard of teaching and support for pupils.
- Confident and polite pupils.
- Effective leadership, staff teamwork and the quality of pastoral care.
- Excellent accommodation.

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

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 who responded to the questionnaire were positive about the school. Almost all thought that it was well led and had a good reputation in the community. All parents thought that their children enjoyed being at school and found the work stimulating and challenging. They felt that teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and that they had explained how parents could support children with homework. Most parents agreed that the school dealt appropriately with any incidents of poor behaviour. All pupils enjoyed being at school and felt safe and well looked after. They thought that teachers expected them to work hard, explained things clearly and listened to what they had to say. Almost all felt that the behaviour of pupils was good. Staff were very positive about all aspects of the school's work. They appreciated the support of the headteacher and felt that there was a strong sense of teamwork amongst staff. They thought that there was mutual respect between staff and pupils and that staff set high standards for pupils' attainment.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Teachers provided pupils with a broad curriculum. They offered pupils a well-judged range of stimulating learning activities in areas such as English language, mathematics, health promotion and enterprise education. Staff made effective use of computers in information and communications technology (ICT) to support and extend pupils' learning. Visiting specialist staff provided pupils with high quality learning experiences in physical education, art and craft, drama and music. Teachers did not always take sufficient account of pupils' previous knowledge and skills when planning work in Environmental Studies and religious and moral education. The quality of teaching was very good. Teachers were well organised, gave clear explanations and set high standards for pupils' attainment. In almost all lessons, teachers made effective use of questioning to check and reinforce pupils' understanding. The quality of interaction and discussion between teachers and pupils was consistently strong. Staff provided purposeful opportunities for pupils to work together and learn from each other. They provided pupils with a broad range of well-judged homework activities.

The quality of pupils' learning was good. Pupils were well motivated and had positive attitudes to learning. Almost all were able to work independently with the minimum of supervision. Pupils listened attentively to staff and worked well with each other. Pupils' skills across the expressive arts were enhanced through their involvement in events such as musical festivals, school productions and sporting events. They made good use of computers to extend their learning. Pupils presented their work well. However, the quality of pupils' handwriting was variable.

Pupils were caring and supportive. They were sensitive to the needs of others, worked well together and were developing appropriate citizenship skills. Those at P6 and P7

helped younger pupils in the playground and class. Pupils were actively involved in the life of the school and had regular opportunities to contribute to the decision making process through the pupil council. They had taken part in a variety of enterprise activities such as designing and organising the painting of playground games. They were currently designing a garden area and planning the end of term Sparkle Ball. Pupils' achievements across the expressive arts were enhanced by the use of specialist staff and instrumental tutors. All pupils were developing an appreciation of Gaelic through participation in Feis activities and the local Mòd.

English language

The quality of pupils' attainment in English language was very good. In recent years, the level of pupils' attainment in reading and writing had been consistently high. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Across the school, a significant number of pupils achieved these levels at an earlier stage than might normally be expected. Pupils were making very good progress in their coursework. Those who experienced difficulties with aspects of reading and writing were well supported by staff and were making very good progress in their learning. Pupils' talking and listening skills were very well developed. They listened attentively and talked confidently to staff and each other. Pupils had access to a range of good quality reading material. They read with fluency and understanding. Pupils' writing skills were well developed. They wrote for a variety of purposes and produced extended pieces of high quality written work, particularly in the area of imaginative writing. Pupils' skills in punctuation, spelling and grammar were very good.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was good. In recent years, the level of pupils' attainment in mathematics had been consistently high. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in key outcomes of mathematics and a number of pupils had achieved these levels at an earlier stage than might normally be expected. Pupils at all stages were making good progress in their coursework. Those with additional support needs in mathematics were well supported by staff and were making good progress in their learning. Pupils made good use of computers to create simple graphs but their skills in using databases and spreadsheets were not well-developed. Pupils' skills in written and mental calculation were very good. By P7, pupils could accurately carry out calculations involving fractions, percentages and decimals. Pupils could use practical equipment effectively to measure volume, weight and length. They had a very good understanding of the properties of shape. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry were not good. They could solve basic problems but could not identify or apply a sufficiently wide range of problem solving strategies.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The quality of pastoral care in the school was very good. Staff had a very good working relationship with pupils and there was a strong sense of mutual respect. Teachers were sensitive to pupils' physical, social and emotional needs and worked effectively to provide well-judged support for pupils. They were developing pupils' understanding of the importance of good health and a healthy lifestyle. The school had well-established

procedures for child protection and the administration of medicine. All staff had received an appropriate level of training in child protection. The school had an effective anti-bullying policy in place. Pupils felt free to discuss concerns with any member of staff.

The headteacher and staff had a very good understanding of pupils' learning needs. She worked closely with staff and the support for learning teacher to provide well-judged support for pupils. The learning support teacher provided high quality learning experiences for pupils with additional support needs. The classroom assistant and clerical assistant worked closely with teachers to ensure that pupils' learning needs were met. Teachers had recently introduced an effective range of systems for pupils to evaluate their own work and set targets for their learning. The pace of learning and choice of activities in English language were very good. However, teachers did not always present sufficient challenge or take account of pupils' prior learning when planning tasks and activities in environmental studies and religious and moral education.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was excellent. The school had been rebuilt in 1994 to provide a spacious and stimulating learning environment. The teaching areas, gym hall and extensive playground areas were used effectively by staff. The building was suitable for users with restricted mobility. Effective security arrangements were in place. The school was in a very good state of repair. Staff produced high quality displays of pupils' work.
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 in the school and the interaction between staff and pupils was very good. Pupils were polite and well behaved. All staff contributed to the development of the positive ethos within the school and worked well together to support staff and pupils. The school used a number of successful strategies to increase pupils' understanding of racial equality and discrimination. Staff made effective use of praise to encourage, motivate and reward pupils. They set high expectations for pupils' attainment and achievement. Staff, pupils and parents took part in a wide range of fundraising events. The school chaplain or church members were actively involved in the weekly assembly which provided very good opportunities for religious observance and to highlight pupils' achievements.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The quality of partnership arrangements with parents and the community was very good. The School Board worked in close partnership with the school and was very supportive. Parents were actively involved in a range of school events and activities. The headteacher communicated effectively with parents through the school handbook, newsletters and the monthly parental meeting. Teachers met with parents to discuss their children's progress twice each year. They produced a detailed annual progress report for each pupil. The headteacher had consulted with parents over sensitive health issues. The school took part in a wide variety of competitions and community events.

7. Improving the school

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

Staff worked together as an effective team to provide pupils with a consistently good standard of education within a caring and stimulating learning environment. The quality of teaching was very good. Teachers provided pupils with good learning experiences, particularly in English language, mathematics and the expressive arts. Pupils were making good progress in their learning and the standard of pupils' attainment in English language was very good.

The school had the clear capacity to ensure ongoing improvement. The experienced headteacher was committed to the school and had established a strong sense of teamwork. She provided very good leadership and was very well organised. She had a clear sense of vision and was held in high regard by staff, pupils, parents and the community. The headteacher used a range of effective strategies to evaluate the work of the school and monitor the quality of learning and teaching. She monitored teaching plans, observed lessons, discussed pupils' progress and gave constructive feedback to teachers. The headteacher and staff had started to use quality indicators to evaluate the school's work and identify improvement priorities.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to ensure improvement in:

- pupils' learning experiences in environmental studies and religious and moral education by ensuring that the choice of activities presents sufficient challenge to meet the needs of all learners; and
- pupils' understanding of problem-solving strategies in mathematics.

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

3 October 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	good
The teaching process	very good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	very good
Meeting pupils' needs	good

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

Improving the school	
Leadership	very good
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. 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"> • Children enjoyed school and found school work stimulating and interesting. • The school had a good reputation in the community. • Staff showed care and concern for their children. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • School reports gave parents helpful information on their children's progress. 	<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 enjoyed being at school and thought that teachers helped them when they had difficulties with their work. • Teachers explained things clearly, told them when they had done something well and were good at letting them know how to improve. • They were treated fairly and teachers listened to what they said. • They had a say in deciding how to make the school better. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. 	<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

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