

**Ardler Primary School  
Dundee City Council**

**31 August 2004**

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## **1. Background**

Ardler Primary School was inspected in April 2004 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 and the environment for learning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation. They 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. Members of the inspection team also met a group of parents. There was no School Board.

The school serves an area of Dundee, located in the northwest of the city. The school was being managed by an acting headteacher who had been in this post since October 2002. At the time of the inspection the roll was 144, including 63 in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well above the national average. Pupils' attendance was slightly below the national average.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Very effective pastoral care for pupils.
- Good use of education authority programmes to support pupils in their learning.
- High level of support from visiting support staff which enriched pupils' experiences.
- Pupils' uptake and achievement in wider areas such as music and sport.

## **3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff**

The inspection team found that parents and carers, pupils and staff were positive and supportive about most aspects of the school. Almost all felt the school enjoyed a good reputation in the local community and that children enjoyed being at school. They commented that parents' evenings were helpful and informative. A few wanted to know more about how to support their child with homework. Pupils thought that teachers explained things clearly and were good at letting them know how to improve their learning. Many felt they were not always treated fairly and that the behaviour of other pupils was not always good. They also wanted to have a greater say in deciding how to make the school better. Staff liked working in the school. They felt they worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community. A

number of staff reported that training time was not used effectively. Some support staff commented that standards set for pupil attainment were not high enough.

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

The curriculum was broad and balanced and enabled pupils to develop a range of skills. The school made effective use of education authority advice on the curriculum to provide progress and continuity in pupils' learning. The school made good use of the local environment to support aspects of the curriculum. This enabled pupils to develop effectively their knowledge and skills in, for example physical education, science and reading. However, the school did not make fully effective use of the additional time allocated to the study of English language and mathematics to improve attainment. In particular, there were too few opportunities for pupils to develop appropriate skills in listening and talking. There were not enough planned activities for pupils to apply mathematics in other areas of the curriculum. The programme for information and communications technology (ICT) did not always develop pupils' skills systematically and progressively across all stages. Some teachers introduced and shared the purpose of lessons effectively with pupils. A few teachers made good use of assessment information to plan next steps in learning. However, the pace of teaching was too slow and a few lessons were too long. There was not enough differentiation to ensure all pupils made good progress. Questioning did not always encourage pupils to think and reflect. Homework was not stimulating or consistently applied throughout the school.

Pupils were lively and keen to learn. In the early years, pupils were learning a good range of skills through play. Pupils participated effectively in some activities designed to make them think for themselves. Pupils in the upper stages worked well together and carried out various team tasks effectively when motivated. They responded well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and achievement. Most were sensitive to the views of others and responded well during class discussions. They were creative when miming and playing games. Overall, however, pupils required to be encouraged to think more for themselves and become more independent. They did not have enough responsibility for their learning. Pupils were not always clear about the standards expected of them and did not always present their work well. The pace of learning was not brisk enough in almost all lessons and the majority of pupils did not consistently remain focused on the work set for them. Younger pupils were learning basic skills in ICT, as were a few pupils in the upper stages, but overall, pupils' skills were underdeveloped throughout the school.

The school provided a good range of experiences and initiatives to promote pupils' personal and social development, including their awareness of health issues and citizenship. Pupils participated effectively in drug awareness and fitness activities. They sang well and particularly enjoyed working with the visiting music specialist. Pupils successfully took part in choirs and regularly competed in local sports competitions and events. Many enjoyed sporting and musical success which was recognised at assemblies. Pupils enjoyed working collaboratively in teams with the youth sports development workers. They supported fund-raising activities for various charities. Older pupils were learning to read stories effectively to younger pupils. A

pupil council provided pupils with some opportunities to influence decisions about their learning environment, but there was scope to extend this further.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was fair. Standards had not been maintained over the last three years. Pupils' attainment in reading had significantly fallen, although there had been a slight increase in writing. Across the stages, the majority of pupils achieved appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. A few exceeded these levels in reading and writing. Most pupils at the early stages were making good progress in the development of their literacy skills. Pupils in the middle and upper stages did not make good progress in all aspects. They listened to and responded well to other pupils and adults but were not sufficiently skilled in group discussion. Pupils lacked confidence when talking in front of a larger group. Less than half were making good progress in reading. By P7, the majority of pupils read regularly for their own enjoyment. A few were motivated by books and stories. Pupils in the upper stages wrote interesting stories for younger pupils and paid good attention to detail in terms of content, target audience and illustrations to support younger readers. The majority wrote well for a variety of purposes including as part of their work in citizenship, drugs awareness and healthy living. A few wrote poems well. Standards in spelling, handwriting and presentation of written work were inconsistent.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was fair. Levels of pupils' attainment had declined over the last three years. Most pupils in the early stages and the majority in the middle and upper stages were achieving appropriate national levels. Pupils showed good skills in interpreting graphs and charts but not in using ICT skills to handle information. Pupils' numerical skills and their mental agility were generally developing well. However, many pupils in the upper stages were less skilled in, and had poor understanding of, fractions. Pupils had good skills in handling money and at most stages had a good knowledge of shape, position and movement. At all stages, pupils had insufficient awareness of the range of strategies they might use to solve problems and many found difficulty in setting down solutions in a clear and logical fashion.

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

The acting headteacher and staff were committed to ensuring that pupils' well-being was a key priority in the life of the school. They knew pupils very well and were sensitive to their social and emotional needs. Child protection procedures were well-established and effective. Care and welfare arrangements were very well developed and implemented effectively. Arrangements for supervision of pupils and for identifying and responding to pupils' concerns about bullying were very good. Pupils felt safe and confident and enjoyed being in school. They were treated fairly by staff. However, the school should take steps to address the perceptions that a number of pupils had about not being fairly treated.

Teachers identified pupils' learning needs from early in P1 and took good account of the information provided by the nursery at the time of transition. In consultation with

class teachers, the support for learning teachers planned appropriate work that helped pupils overcome difficulties they were experiencing in their classwork. Support for learning staff had developed well-structured, individualised educational programmes (IEPs) for pupils with particular difficulties. However, short-term targets covered too long a period of time. Class teachers had taken some steps to match tasks, activities and resources to the needs of individual pupils but weaknesses in assessing their performance meant some pupils were insufficiently challenged by the work provided. A range of outside agencies was used effectively to support pupils and meet their varied needs. The classroom assistant was well deployed across the school to support groups of pupils in classes.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The school provided a welcoming environment. Overall, the quality of internal accommodation and facilities was good and well maintained. Pupils had good access to supervised, playground areas. However, these areas were not always well maintained. Staff and pupils benefited from good-sized classrooms and additional facilities including, for example, a large gym hall, a music room, an ICT room and a library. Local families benefited from use of an early years provision and after school club. Displays of pupils' work were very attractively presented. Members of the pupil council had been effectively involved in planning an area where pupils could play when they wanted to feel safer at break-times. However, the rear door did not always close to ensure security in the building. There was limited disabled access to the school.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Overall, pupils were polite and caring towards one another. In most cases, the quality of relationships between staff and pupils was good. Pupils, parents and staff identified with the school. They took pride in the school's achievements. Pupils responded well to teachers' expectations of achievement across a broad range of activities. However, expectations of pupils' attainment were not always appropriately high. There were inconsistencies in their expectations of pupils' learning. Staff fostered an ethos which promoted positive attitudes, mutual respect and fairness. The school regularly celebrated pupils' achievements and successes through achievement boards, articles in the local press and in school newsletters. There were regular opportunities for religious observance.</p>

Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established a good partnership with parents and the acting headteacher had earned their respect and confidence. However, there was no School Board or other system to enable parents to have a more active role in making decisions about school life. Parents supported children on outings and helped with fund raising. Parents' evenings, information leaflets, golden time activities, open days and helpful reports on children's progress kept parents well informed. However, there were insufficient opportunities for parents to be involved in the classrooms. The school had established good links with local primary and secondary schools. One local school made good use of the school's ICT suite. The school had productive links with a number of local agencies, sports groups and groups in the Ardler Village community.
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## 7. Improving the school

The acting headteacher and staff were effective in providing pupils with a caring and supportive learning environment. Pupils had good opportunities to develop personally and socially through being involved in a range of activities both during and after the school day. Staff ensured good attention to pupils' care and welfare, inclusion and citizenship. However, the school needed to improve a number of key aspects of its work. Standards of attainment in English language and mathematics had declined over the last three years. There was scope to improve pupils' attainment further by providing them with greater challenge and improving the pace of learning.

The quality of leadership was fair. An acting headteacher had managed the school during the current school session. She had been successful in taking forward some improvements on citizenship with a view to better meeting pupils' needs. She was well respected by staff, pupils and parents and had been successful in promoting pupils' broader achievements. She had the confidence of parents and supported staff well in matters related to pupil behaviour and support for learning. She worked hard to support the regeneration of the Ardler Village. However, she did not always focus sufficiently on evaluating and improving key areas of the school's work, including the quality of teaching, pupils' learning and levels of attainment.

Arrangements for self-evaluation and quality assurance were fair. The acting headteacher, in conjunction with staff, had identified some appropriate priorities for development but was at an early stage in taking these forward. Assessment information was held on the school's tracking system but was not used sufficiently to monitor and improve levels of attainment. The acting headteacher had some informal mechanisms for monitoring the work of the school but did not focus enough on the quality of pupils' experiences and their attainment. Staff had not been meaningfully involved in self-evaluation. The acting headteacher, in consultation with staff, should now introduce systematic approaches to self-evaluation that focus on improving the quality

of learning and teaching and raising levels of attainment. They should act on the outcomes to improve the quality of education and ensure that the needs of all pupils are addressed more effectively.

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvement in:

- attainment in English language and mathematics;
- the pace and challenge in learning and teaching;
- involving more parents in school life through a more proactive approach;
- ensuring a greater focus on improving leadership for learning; and
- monitoring and evaluation arrangements to ensure high quality education for all.

### **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 and carers. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in another report to parents and carers, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Moira Cummings  
HM Inspector

31 August 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

### **We judged the following to be very good**

- Pastoral care

### **We judged the following to be good**

- Structure of the curriculum
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Accommodation and facilities
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents and the community

### **We judged the following to be fair**

- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

### **We judged the following to be unsatisfactory**

- No aspects were found to be in this category

## Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

<p><b>What pleased parents and carers most</b></p>	<p><b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school informed them about their child's strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>• Staff made them feel welcome in the school and parents' evenings were helpful and informative.</li> <li>• Staff showed care and concern for the care and welfare of their child.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents wanted to know how they could support their child with homework.</li> <li>• Some would like to have a clear idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of its pupils.</li> <li>• Some wanted better maintenance of the school buildings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased pupils most</b></p>	<p><b>What pupils would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils felt teachers explained things clearly and helped them with work.</li> <li>• Teachers checked their homework.</li> <li>• Teachers explained work clearly and expected them to work as hard as they could.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many pupils wanted the behaviour of other pupils in the school to improve and to be treated more fairly in the school.</li> <li>• Many pupils wanted to have more say in deciding how to make the school better.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased staff most</b></p>	<p><b>What staff would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff liked working in the school and almost all felt it was well led.</li> <li>• Staff worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community.</li> <li>• The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying.</li> <li>• Pupil success was regularly celebrated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few teaching staff and many support staff wanted staff training time to be used more effectively.</li> <li>• Some support staff did not feel that the school set high standards for pupils' attainment.</li> <li>• Some support staff wanted more opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.</li> </ul>

## **How can you contact us?**

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, 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, Wellgate House (Level 5), The Wellgate, Dundee DD1 2DB or by telephoning 01382 224155. Copies are also available on our website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

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