

**Arisaig Primary School
The Highland Council
19 September 2006**

Contents	Page
1. Background	1
2. Key strengths	1
3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?	2
4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?	2
5. How well are pupils supported?	4
6. How good is the environment for learning?	4
7. Improving the school	6
Appendix 1 Indicators of quality	8
Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses	9
How can you contact us?	10

1. Background

Arisaig 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, a group of parents¹ and the local priest.

The school serves the village of Arisaig and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 52, including 15 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average. The school had experienced an unsettled period of staffing at the early stages, but this had settled in the current session. The learning support teacher was absent during the inspection. The school was not entitled to janitorial support and one classroom assistant post was still unfilled.

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

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The excellent pastoral care provided by a close and supportive team of staff.
- Polite and friendly pupils who were actively involved in the decision-making processes of the school.
- Excellent partnership with parents and links with the local community.
- The headteacher's leadership in improving the school's ethos and providing a wide range of experiences for pupils.

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.

Half of all parents responded to the questionnaire. Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. Parents felt that their children were very happy at school and that they were encouraged to be confident and self-assured. They thought that the school had a very good reputation in the community and was well led. All pupils agreed that teachers explained things clearly and that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. All staff enjoyed working in the school and thought it was very well led by the headteacher.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The school provided pupils with a broad and varied curriculum. Additional time had been allocated to personal and social development and to English language at the early stages to help raise attainment. There was evidence that this was making a positive impact on improved achievement and attainment. There was a strong focus on healthy living, including residential outdoor education excursions for older pupils. These had been used successfully to develop their independence and team-working skills. Staff were successfully integrating citizenship and enterprise into the curriculum. The quality of the curriculum was further strengthened by the support of specialist teachers in physical education, music and art and design, and special projects from visiting artists. The quality of teaching was good overall. Teachers used questions effectively to check pupils' understanding and in line with their ages and stages of development. There was some very good interactive teaching in English language but little whole class, direct teaching in mathematics. In mathematics and reading there was too much of a focus on working through published schemes. Teachers did not focus sufficiently on sharing with pupils what they needed to do to improve their work. Homework was set and marked in all classes but there was scope to extend the variety of tasks.

Staff worked well together to establish and promote a positive learning environment for pupils. Pupils were polite, hard-working and very well behaved. They stayed on task and worked well without close supervision. They also cooperated effectively with others when working on group tasks. However, in a minority of lessons, the pace of learning was too slow and the choice of activities was not sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of higher-achieving pupils. Pupils were not able to explain what they needed to do specifically to improve their work in mathematics or English language.

Pupils were achieving well in a wide range of areas. They were actively involved in the life of the school and had made improvements to the school grounds through their involvement in the pupil council. At all stages, pupils were developing a good practical knowledge of healthy and safe lifestyles. All pupils from P2 could swim and some older pupils were accomplished swimmers. Younger pupils could talk about keeping safe near water and successfully undertook a range of practical activities linked to a

visit from the local coastguard. Older pupils were developing their fitness and their personal and social skills through residential visits to local islands. Pupils at P4 had an impressive repertoire of Gaelic songs. Older pupils were developing an awareness of the lives of children in India through imaginative class work. At the middle and upper stages, pupils used information and communications technology (ICT) confidently to make and deliver PowerPoint presentations. They enhanced their work using digital photography and conducted video conferences with other schools. At all stages, pupils produced art and design work of a high standard. They had recently worked with an artist to create highly colourful prints and, with support from the headteacher, had developed high quality panoramic digital prints of local scenery.

English language

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was good. Progress was not sustained consistently as pupils progressed through the middle to upper stages. Across the stages, most pupils achieved appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. At all stages, a few pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who had yet to attain appropriate levels were making steady progress. All coped well with classwork. Pupils listened attentively and responded well to teachers' instructions and explanations. Senior pupils had given a range of talks using PowerPoint presentations. They planned their talks well although their sense of audience needed to be better. At all stages, pupils read accurately and with good comprehension. Pupils were encouraged to read for pleasure. Older pupils wrote interesting book reports which demonstrated a good awareness of how writers achieved their effects. They were less confident in talking about the books they had read. Most pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes and applied their language skills well. From P5 to P7, higher attaining pupils were not sufficiently challenged to develop extended pieces of writing and were capable of attaining higher standards. At all stages, the standard of pupils' spelling and presentation of work was good.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Most pupils were achieving and a few were exceeding appropriate national levels for their stage. However, some pupils at the upper stages had taken national assessments before they were secure in key aspects of the work. At the early stages, pupils were making good progress in their learning. Progress was too slow at the middle and upper stages. At the upper stages, pupils had used computers effectively to record and present information. At all stages, most pupils performed written calculations accurately but their mental calculation was not quick enough. At P4, pupils were confident when using money. At P6 and P7, pupils were not secure in tasks involving fractions, decimals and percentages. Knowledge of shapes and angles was good at all stages. At all stages, pupils could apply their problem solving skills to tackle real-life problems. Pupils at the upper stages had measured and built garden furniture and planters. They had benefited from opportunities to budget and plan journeys for their expeditions and were able to discuss the effectiveness of their methods.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The school had excellent arrangements to ensure the care and welfare of pupils. Teaching and support staff responded sensitively to pupils' individual physical, social and emotional needs. Pupils with special medical needs were very well cared for. There was a family atmosphere in the school and pupils felt safe, secure and happy. Staff had a clear understanding of the school's arrangements for child protection and had received appropriate training. They implemented the school's procedures for managing any incidents of bullying and racism effectively. They understood the protocols for school trips and excursions and involved pupils in risk assessment beforehand. Pupils were confident that if they had a concern they would be able to talk to someone about it. A number of them attended the daily breakfast club. There were very effective arrangements to support P1 pupils entering the school and P7 pupils transferring to the associated secondary school.

Overall, the arrangements for meeting pupils' learning needs were good. Staff used an appropriate range of resources and approaches to build on pupils' prior experiences and to stimulate their interest. They had begun to track pupils' progress and share learning targets with them. However, class grouping arrangements and learning programmes in mathematics and reading did not provide consistent challenge to higher attaining pupils, particularly at the upper stages. Staff were vigilant in identifying and referring pupils with additional support needs. During the absence of the learning support teacher, the headteacher carried out a range of assessments and sought appropriate advice to help pupils improve their learning. The school had drawn up appropriate individualised educational programmes for a small number of pupils. These programmes set clear learning targets and were reviewed by parents and pupils. The support for learning auxiliary provided very effective support to pupils and teachers. The long-term shortage of a classroom assistant at the early stages limited the range of approaches that the class teacher could use to manage the learning of the multi-stage composite class. A parent helper was providing good support to the class teacher in the absence of the assistant.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was weak overall, although some aspects were unsatisfactory. Space was very limited. However, staff, along with parents, had made sustained efforts to improve the learning environment and maintain the building. Staff made good use of the available wall space in classrooms, corridors and entrance hall to display pupils' work and enhance the learning environment. The hall was used as a gymnasium and also by the nursery and had to be cleared for indoor physical education. There was no hot water in the pupils' toilets. The staffroom was small and office accommodation was unsatisfactory.

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Separate car parking helped to ensure pupils' safety. The building was not accessible to disabled users and aspects of security needed to be addressed as a matter of priority.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. The school was welcoming and friendly. There was an effective and caring staff team. Staff and pupils identified strongly with the school and morale was high. Pupils managed their own behaviour well and there was a calm, purposeful atmosphere in the school. Pupils' views were listened to and action taken on issues raised. Teachers set high expectations of behaviour but were less consistent in their demands on pupils' learning and attainment. The school placed a strong emphasis on recognising and rewarding pupils' achievements, including effective use of assemblies. Staff promoted equality, respect and tolerance by teaching and by example. Pupils learned about different cultures as part of their coursework and were learning to value the differences between people. They enjoyed opportunities for religious observance at weekly assemblies and classes led by the local minister and priest.
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established strong partnerships with parents and the local community. The School Board was very supportive of the work of the school. The school produced a comprehensive handbook and regular newsletters for parents and had run workshops for them on sensitive health issues and aspects of the curriculum. A notable feature was a twelve week parenting programme run by the headteacher for parents. This reinforced the school's approach to managing behaviour and was positively received by parents. Regular reports to parents provided helpful information on pupils' progress. The headteacher worked closely with the local community and had initiated a number of important developments such as links with the café-gallery to display pupils' work. Well-planned transition programmes supported pupils as they moved from nursery to P1 and from P7 to the local secondary school.

7. Improving the school

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

The school provided a caring, supportive and inclusive environment for pupils. Staff were committed to the care and welfare of pupils and to maintaining close parental links to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils and staff identified strongly with the school and there were effective approaches for promoting good behaviour. Most pupils were attaining good standards in their coursework but some pupils were capable of achieving more, particularly at the middle and upper stages. Pupils responded very positively to the wide range of excursions and other opportunities provided for them outwith normal classwork. They were achieving success in a wide range of activities, particularly outdoor education, ICT and art and design.

The headteacher provided effective leadership. He was innovative in using ICT, outdoor education and parenting workshops to promote the development of pupils' wider achievements. He was entrepreneurial and had been successful in establishing an enjoyable and stimulating learning environment which motivated pupils. The headteacher had established excellent links with the local community and very good teamwork amongst staff. He has not given enough priority to ensuring consistency in learning and teaching in order to enable all pupils to reach higher levels of attainment. The headteacher had set up a number of systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. Staff evaluated their lessons to improve the quality of pupils' learning experiences. The headteacher used surveys and interviews to gather the views of parents, pupils and staff and had achieved success in the national quality awards, Investors in People. With the support of the education authority, he had recently introduced a number of additional procedures, including sampling of pupils' work and the monitoring of classroom practice. Overall, however, there was too little emphasis on monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress and teachers' use of assessment information to set appropriate learning targets for all pupils.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve attainment. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- improve attainment in English language and mathematics;
- increase the pace of learning and level of challenge for pupils, particularly higher attaining pupils at the middle and upper stages;
- develop the school's procedures for self-evaluation with a particular focus on learning and teaching and pupils' understanding of their learning targets; and
- improve the quality of accommodation and address the health and safety issues mentioned in this report.

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.

Dr Fiona Carlisle
HM Inspector

19 September 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	very good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	weak
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

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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education was an enjoyable experience for pupils. • The school dealt effectively with inappropriate behaviour. • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children and treated them fairly. • The school was well led. 	<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"> • Teachers explained things clearly, helped them when they had difficulties with classwork and explained how their learning could be improved. • Staff helped them to keep safe and healthy and looked after them well. • Teachers praised pupils when they had done something well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. • The school was well led. • They enjoyed working in the school. • There was effective communication amongst staff who all had good opportunities to be involved in decision making. 	<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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