

**Central Primary School
Inverness
The Highland Council**

27 April 2004

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1. Background

Central Primary School was inspected in January 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, Gaelic 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 the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a representative of Comunn nam Pàrant, the local organisation for the parents of pupils in Gaelic-medium classes.

The school serves a large residential area on the west side of the River Ness in Inverness. In addition, children who attended Gaelic-medium classes, travelled from within a 20 mile radius of the school, including other parts of the city. The school has New Community School (NCS) status. At the time of the inspection the roll was 425, including 44 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.

Evaluations in this report, except where otherwise indicated, apply equally to the Gaelic-medium and English-medium classes.

An integrated inspection of pre-school provision was carried out at the same time by HMIE and the Care Commission and is the subject of a separate report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The vision and commitment of the headteacher.
- Hard working and dedicated senior managers and staff.
- Robust arrangements for care and welfare to ensure that all pupils were fully included in the life of the school.
- Very good progression within courses, particularly in English and Gaelic language, science and mathematics, which resulted in good continuity of learning for pupils.

- Teachers' high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.
- Effective systems of quality assurance in which the attainment and achievements of pupils were a major focus.

3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff

Overall, parents, pupils and staff were very positive about all aspects of the work of the school. Nearly all parents felt that their children enjoyed school and were particularly pleased about the quality of care and welfare provided. They believed their children were treated fairly. However, many parents were unhappy about the state of the playground. Some parents felt their children's education had been disrupted because of the number of supply teachers. A few parents wanted better communication from the school particularly in relation to the school's priorities in improving their child's education. Pupils stated that teachers expected them to work as hard as they could. They also reported that they had a say in how to make the school better. However, some pupils thought the behaviour of a few pupils was not good enough. Staff appreciated regular discussion about how to achieve the priorities of the school and almost all believed that the school was well led. A few support staff felt they received insufficient respect from some pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

The breadth and balance of the school's curriculum was good. The school had effectively used curricular flexibility to increase the time available for English language and as a result had succeeded in increasing the overall attainment of pupils. Visiting teachers made a valuable contribution to pupils' experiences. Particular initiatives including enterprise projects and attendance at music festivals added further value to the curriculum. Very good guidance was in place for staff in respect of teaching mathematics, English and Gaelic language, and science. This had ensured very good continuity of experience for pupils from nursery to P7, particularly in mathematics and English language. The school recognised the need to review its delivery of programmes for the expressive arts for the English-medium classes.

The overall quality of teaching was good and frequently very good. Staff set clear targets in English language and mathematics which they shared regularly with pupils. Pupils also set their own targets within their personal learning plans. Teachers prepared their work carefully and generally made clear to pupils their high expectations in respect of work and behaviour. Teachers' effective questioning and positive relationships with pupils created a sense of purpose in classes. Appropriate homework tasks were set across all areas of the curriculum. Most pupils in the middle and upper stages were able to work independently. They also co-operated very well, particularly in reading and writing activities. In most classes, pupils were encouraged to work at a brisk pace. Most pupils behaved very well and almost all worked hard. Pupils' knowledge and understanding in science were being developed systematically through

interesting investigations and experiments. Pupils at all stages read widely and were able to discuss with assurance, the meaning of text.

The school very successfully promoted pupils' personal and social development. Pupils were polite and self-assured. The pupil council was an important feature of the school and had been instrumental in the introduction of the lunch-time snack bar. Lunch clubs and study clubs provided support for some pupils and opportunities for responsibility for others. Enterprise activities gave pupils good opportunities to co-operate with each other and improved their understanding of the environment. The school made very good use of World Book Day to promote literacy. Pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT) were being steadily developed. However, teachers were not yet using ICT consistently across the curriculum. The Gaelic choir had excelled at the Royal National Mòd. The English choir had performed well in the local festival. Some pupils took part in the school's football and swimming teams with considerable success in competitions.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. The school had shown increasing attainment at most stages during the past three years. Across all stages, most pupils were achieving appropriate levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing. Many pupils were exceeding national levels. At all stages almost all pupils listened well and talked confidently. In P1/P2, pupils were developing good skills in reading 'big books'. They had quickly acquired good writing skills because of the structured teaching strategies. At all other stages most pupils produced well-sequenced extended pieces of writing. The writing produced by a few pupils at P6/P7 was of a very high standard. Almost all pupils showed genuine interest in reading for enjoyment. Throughout the school, the skills of most pupils in reading for information were developing well.

Gaelic language

The overall quality of attainment in Gaelic language was good. Attainment at P3, P4 and P6 had increased during the past three years. However, attainment in P7 had declined during 2002-2003. From P1 onwards all pupils made very good progress in acquiring skills in listening and talking. By P7 they were able to discuss a wide range of topics in fluent, idiomatic Gaelic. In reading, most pupils at P3 and P6 were achieving national attainment levels. At P7, half of the pupils were attaining these levels and some were exceeding this target. From P3 to P7 pupils effectively used their skills in reading for information to research their work in environmental studies and religious and moral education. In writing, the majority at P3, almost all at P6 and about half at P7, were achieving national attainment levels. Pupils wrote extensively about a range of topics relating to all aspects of the curriculum. A number of pupils in P3 to P5 achieved very high standards in their imaginative adventure stories. Pupils in P7 composed expressive poems and colourful accounts about being caught in an earthquake but required more practice to raise the overall standard of their writing. At P7, pupils' attainment in Gaelic language was now improving.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. During the past four years, there had been a steady improvement. At all stages, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels across all attainment outcomes. Pupils in P1 were confident in using the language of mathematics. At all stages, most pupils could perform mental calculations accurately. They were confident in using strategies for problem-solving and number work. Good use was made of ICT in some classes to improve pupils' understanding of information handling. Homework was used well to reinforce work learned in class. At the upper stages, some pupils found difficulty in working with fractions and percentages.

5. How well are pupils supported?

All staff were confident in implementing well understood child protection and anti-bullying procedures. The School Liaison Group effectively co-ordinated support from a range of agencies in order to provide specialist support for pupils' social and emotional needs. Along with support staff, senior pupils helped ensure good behaviour in the playground by providing supervision and support for younger pupils. As part of the school's initiative to become a health-promoting school, some pupils attended the breakfast club. The school had plans to take part in the 'Safer Routes to School Initiative' in view of the potential hazards arising from car users dropping-off and collecting pupils outside the school.

Overall, approaches to meeting pupils' needs were good. Pupils' additional support needs were effectively identified and assessed by support for learning teachers, the educational psychologist and the behaviour support co-ordinator. The behaviour of some pupils was particularly challenging. However, the NCS initiative had enabled the school to develop some imaginative strategies to respond to these complex needs. The school's strong commitment to supporting pupils with a wide range of additional needs involved the headteacher in reviewing frequently the deployment of resources. Regular meetings, involving parents and representatives from other agencies, ensured pupils' progress was monitored. Records of Needs were updated appropriately. The school had good approaches to setting learning targets for all pupils. Pupils had been organised in ability groups for language and mathematics at some stages. The school was monitoring these arrangements to ensure it was the best approach to meeting needs. However, some teachers were less skilled than others in providing tasks which took good account of the wide range of pupils' abilities. Some teachers needed to make better use of the information from the good range of assessments to ensure the needs of all pupils were fully met. Classroom assistants and auxiliaries supported pupils well. However, teachers in the English-medium classes, needed to provide these staff with more direction and support.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was fair. The headteacher made best use of the four separate school buildings and very good displays of pupils' work were a prominent feature. Accommodation for providing specialist support for pupils with challenging and complex needs was restricted and the school had no central library. The school had a very secure entry system but waiting areas for parents inside the building were inadequate. The uneven surface of the playground was potentially hazardous and the lay-out meant that pupils were unable to play freely. Access for those with physical disabilities was severely limited.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Staff and pupils were very proud of the school. Almost all pupils were very courteous and well behaved. The headteacher had developed an effective team of staff who were skilled in working together. The pupil council was a confident group of pupils who raised concerns and took their responsibilities seriously. They had recently organised a petition in which they expressed their wish to maintain access to a local park. Weekly assemblies provided opportunities to celebrate achievement, address social issues and undertake religious observance. The headteacher had been successful in establishing a climate of achievement for all. The school was very effective in ensuring that all pupils in the Gaelic and English-medium classes were treated equally and valued aspects of different cultures.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had good links with parents and carers, and the School Board. The PTA had recently grown in number and supported the school well by raising funds. The school sought the views of parents through questionnaires. Parents had also been consulted about the school's approaches to health education. Regular newsletters updated them with information about the school. Parents were informed about their children's progress through a brief interim report and a more informative annual report. The school held useful open afternoons and evening meetings. However, the headteacher was aware that some parents wanted more information about their children's progress and about her vision and that of the authority, for the school. She had plans to address this. Good links had been established with local</p>

Aspect	Comment
	churches, the theatre, local businesses, and with the associated secondary schools.

7. Improving the school

The school provided a very positive educational experience for pupils within a happy, secure and caring environment. Its strong focus on achievement had resulted in most pupils attaining or exceeding national attainment targets. Most pupils were confident and able to express their views. Effective team-work was a positive feature and staff supported each other well. The school met the wide range of different needs effectively and used its links with agencies to best effect. The quality of teaching and learning was good and sometimes very good.

The headteacher provided very effective leadership. She had conveyed her vision to staff who were inspired and motivated by her. She intended to further develop the partnership with parents. Her commitment to raising achievement and valuing all pupils equally was evident in all developments. In particular, she was focusing on raising the attainment of pupils in P7 within the Gaelic-medium class. During the past two years significant staff absence had presented particular challenges and had affected the continuous improvement of attainment at some stages of the school. The three depute headteachers carried out their duties very effectively within their limited time for management. The headteacher had empowered her staff to share responsibility for improving the school. They were clear about priorities for future development and made valuable contributions to working groups. The very effective approaches of senior managers to monitoring practice included the evaluation of teachers' plans, scrutiny of pupils' jotters and focused observation of classroom practice. Teachers were confident in monitoring their own and each other's work. The school had clearly demonstrated its ability to improve during the past three years and was very well placed to continue this improvement.

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

- address the safety of the pupils in relation to the uneven surface of the playground;
- improve attainment in Gaelic and English language in the upper stages of the Gaelic-medium classes;

- improve approaches to the use made of assessment across the school, and provide training to classroom assistants in English-medium classes so that the needs of all pupils are consistently met; and
- build upon the close partnership with parents and share with them more effectively, the vision for 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 and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report parents and carers will be informed about the progress made by the school.

Lorna Walker
HM Inspector

27 April 2004

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Effectiveness and deployment of staff with additional responsibilities
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in Gaelic
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be fair

- Accommodation and facilities

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.

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • Staff made them feel welcome in the school. • Their children found school work stimulating and challenging. • There was mutual respect between teachers and their children. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They wished to have a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of their children.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers regularly checked their homework. • Teachers helped them when they were stuck. • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • They got on well with other children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of some pupils in the school.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication between senior managers and staff. • Good opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes. • Indiscipline was dealt with effectively. • Pupil success was regularly celebrated. • They liked working in the school. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff had no significant concerns. • Some ancillary staff believed that there was insufficient respect between them and pupils.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Education, Culture and 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.

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report, you should write in the first instance to Frank Crawford, HMCI at HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

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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