

**Gartocharn Primary School
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West Dunbartonshire Council
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1. Background

Gartocharn 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, representatives of the parent association (PA), and a group of parents¹.

The inspection team also evaluated aspects of the school's progress in implementing national recommendations related to improving aspects of school meals provision.

The school serves the village of Gartocharn and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 90. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The calm and purposeful learning environment and the confident, courteous and well behaved pupils.
- Positive relationships between teachers, pupils and support staff and the commitment to the care and welfare of the pupils.
- The successful promotion of a healthy lifestyle.
- Links with parents, support agencies and the wider community.
- The leadership of the school.

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 were pleased with all aspects of the school's provision. They thought teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment and encouraged their children to work to the best of their ability. They felt that the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. All parents felt welcome in school and thought that their children found school work stimulating and challenging. Pupils' responses were very positive. They felt safe and well looked after in school and stated that they knew what to do if they were upset. They thought the behaviour of pupils was good. They particularly liked having a say in deciding how to make the school better. All staff liked working in the school and thought the school was well led. They stated that there was mutual respect between pupils and teachers and standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld. A few teachers said that they did not have sufficient opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Pupils experienced a very good, well balanced curriculum. The flexible use of additional time allocated to support the teaching of writing, and the introduction of a new approach to teaching writing, had contributed to an improvement in attainment. The school placed a strong emphasis on health education and personal and social development. It had recently gained 'Health Promoting School' status. Staff provided pupils with positive experiences in enterprise and citizenship. Pupils had developed good skills in information and communications technology (ICT), and were applying them well across the curriculum. The overall quality of teaching was good. Teachers organised lessons well and gave clear instructions and explanations. All teachers used an appropriate range of approaches when working with individuals and groups. They made effective use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and stimulate thinking. Teachers listened well to pupils' responses and praised their contributions to discussions. However, they did not share consistently with pupils what they expected them to learn. Regular homework activities supported pupils' learning well.

The quality of pupils' learning was good. Almost all pupils were motivated and enthusiastic learners. Most pupils worked well independently and were able to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. A few were not sufficiently challenged by the pace of learning. In several classes, pupils were assessing their own work well. A few pupils were unsure about what they needed to do to improve, particularly in mathematics. Pupils collaborated well in groups and responded enthusiastically to opportunities to work together and learn from each other. Across the school, they were developing very good investigative skills in science. Pupils from P5 to P7 used their problem solving skills well in art and design. Those at the early stages had insufficient opportunities to work together and learn through play activities.

Pupils were actively involved in the life of the school and spoke enthusiastically about their role in the decision-making process. They had been consulted about a number of important developments, including improvements to the school grounds and the formation of school rules. Pupils were regularly given opportunities to take responsibility through their involvement in the pupil council and the Eco School programme. Those in P2 and P3 had successfully involved the whole school in their recycling project. Older pupils acted as ‘buddies’ for younger pupils and supported them well in the playground. Across the school, pupils showed concern for others by using their enterprise skills to raise money for local and international charities. Older pupils were developing an understanding of aspects of responsibility and citizenship through visits to the elderly residents in a local hospital. At all stages, pupils developed teambuilding skills through taking part in excursions, playground games and after school activities. Pupils’ involvement in a range of activities for example, live music and drama presentations, competitions, and organising book fairs had helped develop their confidence and self-esteem.

English language

The overall quality of pupils’ attainment in English language was good. In recent years, attainment in reading had fluctuated slightly. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. A few pupils at all stages were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Across the school, almost all pupils talked confidently about their personal experiences and could express their ideas and opinions clearly. A few were less skilled in listening well to others in small group discussions. However, by P6 and P7, pupils had developed very good skills in listening and talking. At all stages, pupils were making good progress with reading and could read aloud fluently with good expression and understanding. They knew how to find information and made good independent use of the Internet for research. Almost all pupils enjoyed personal reading. At P6 and P7, they could talk confidently about their preferred reading and choice of authors. At all stages, pupils wrote regularly and well for a wide range of purposes. Pupils at the upper stages did not have enough opportunities to use computers to compose and re-draft their writing. Standards of handwriting, punctuation, and spelling were good.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils’ attainment in mathematics was good. Standards of attainment had varied in recent years. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels and a notable minority were attaining these earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs in mathematics were well supported by staff and were making good progress in their learning. Pupils developed their skills effectively through discussion and the opportunities to work together. They had limited opportunities to apply their skills in real life contexts. At all stages, pupils were able to use and interpret an appropriate range of graphs. They had a good understanding of how to use computers to organise data and create graphs. Almost all pupils performed well in written calculations and were developing a very good understanding of time, money and measurement. They were not always as confident in mental calculations. They had a very sound knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shapes and could discuss their properties confidently. Across the stages, pupils could use a range of strategies to solve problems. Overall, the presentation of pupils’ work was very good.

5. How well are pupils supported?

The overall quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff knew their pupils well and responded very effectively to their social, emotional and personal needs. Staff were clear about arrangements for pupils' care and welfare, including attention to child protection and sensitive aspects of health education. Pupils felt safe in school. They supported each other well and were confident in the school's anti-bullying procedures. The school gave very good attention to promoting important aspects of healthy and safe living. Pupils were knowledgeable about nutrition and valued the social experience of eating together at lunchtimes. School meals were popular with pupils, of good quality and attractively presented.

Overall, staff met the needs of pupils well. They had developed effective approaches to identifying and assisting pupils with additional support needs. Teachers ensured that tasks and activities matched the learning needs of most pupils. However, they did not always provide an appropriate level of challenge, particularly for higher attaining pupils. The visiting support for learning teacher and early intervention teacher made very effective contributions to pupils' learning. The support for learning teacher liaised well with staff and provided well judged support to meet the specific needs of individual pupils. She worked effectively with the depute headteacher to prepare and review the individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Parents and pupils, however, were not involved in identifying the learning targets. Pupils with IEPs were making good progress towards achieving their learning targets. Pupils at all stages benefited from the purposeful support from learning assistants. The arrangements for transition from the local nursery to the primary school, and from primary to secondary school, were very good.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The quality of accommodation was good. The building was well maintained and accessible for all users. Building security arrangements were appropriate. Staff had made effective use of the available space. However, there was limited storage space. Pupils' work and achievements were attractively presented throughout the school. Repairs were needed to some window frames and to the ceiling in the boys' toilets. The school grounds had been developed very well to allow pupils to create a school garden. Recent developments had greatly enhanced provision for outdoor activities. Pupils made good use of the well chosen playground equipment and markings when playing games during breaks.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>There was a strong sense of community in the school. Staff and pupils related well to each another and made visitors welcome. Pupil and staff morale was high and all pupils were polite and very well behaved. Teachers and support staff worked together very effectively as a team to support pupils' learning. Pupils related very well to each other and almost all had high expectations of their behaviour and learning. At all stages, pupils were developing positive attitudes about diversity and had a well developed awareness of the needs of others. Weekly school assemblies recognised and celebrated pupils' achievements, and provided good opportunities for religious observance. Teachers promoted positive values and attitudes through effective anti-racism programmes and in aspects of the programmes for social subjects, religious and moral education and personal and social development.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The school had established very good links with parents, the School Board, the PA and the community. Parents were kept well informed about their children's progress through an annual written report, parents' meetings and open afternoons. A range of helpful information leaflets gave good advice on how parents could assist their children's learning, and about health promoting activities in the school. Workshops on aspects of the curriculum provided parents with helpful information about their children's learning. Parents were regularly consulted about sensitive health issues, aspects of the curriculum and planning for school improvement. They assisted in school activities, outings and improvements to the school' environment. The PA and pupils organised a number of fundraising events for charity as well as school funds. Members of the community attended a range of school activities, including book fairs, concerts and enterprise activities. The success of a recent enterprise activity had resulted in a yoga class being established in the village.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

The headteacher and staff provided pupils with a supportive, caring and inclusive learning environment. Pupils were happy, motivated and very well behaved. They were confident and enthusiastic learners and had benefited from the broad range of activities which promoted successful learning. They worked well together in collaborative activities and most were beginning to evaluate their own performance, particularly in English language. Pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics was good. A few pupils were capable of higher attainment and of making faster progress.

The leadership of the school was very good. The experienced headteacher was highly committed and had gained the respect and loyalty of parents, pupils and staff. She had a clear vision for the school and had shared this effectively. The headteacher had fostered strong teamwork by recognising the strengths of individual teachers and encouraging them to take forward identified priorities for development. The deputy headteacher supported the headteacher and staff very well. She fulfilled her remit effectively and shared aspects of leadership. Teachers were fully involved in the process of curriculum development and planning for school improvement. The headteacher and staff regularly reviewed the work of the school and produced an informative standards and quality report for parents. The views of pupils and parents were surveyed and used in planning for improvement. Work on priorities identified in the school's improvement plan was having a significant impact on pupils' learning. The headteacher monitored teachers' plans, observed learning and teaching and provided helpful feedback to teachers. Promoted staff and teachers should work together to continue to improve self-evaluation of learning and teaching to ensure further improvements in consistency of practice. Overall, the school showed good capacity to continue to improve its work.

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 develop approaches to self-evaluation of learning and teaching to improve consistency of practice: and
- ensure that the pace of learning and level of challenge are sufficient to meet the needs of all pupils.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of the 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.

Janet Ure
HM Inspector

24 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	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	very good
Meeting pupils' needs	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Accommodation and facilities	good
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	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. 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"> • Staff made them feel welcome and gave them helpful information about their child’s progress. • Staff kept their children safe and looked after them well. • The school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. • The school kept them informed about its priorities for improvement. 	<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"> • The school kept them safe and healthy. • They were involved in the decision making process. • Teachers listened to what they had to say, told them when they had done well and expected them to work hard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few thought that all pupils were not treated fairly.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were regular discussions about how to achieve school priorities. • Standards of behaviour were consistently upheld in school. • The school communicated well with parents. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers thought they were not sufficiently involved in the decision-making process.

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 Education and Cultural 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, Ground Floor Suite, Unit 7, Blair Court, Clydebank Business Park, Clydebank, G81 2LA or by telephoning 0141 435 3550. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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