

**Sgoil nan Loch
Leurbost
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
24 January 2006**

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1. Background

Sgoil nan Loch was inspected in September 2005. 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 its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, mathematics, science and technology.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including members of the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team met the chairperson of the School Board and representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA).

The school is a 5 to 14 school serving the North Lochs area of Lewis. The school had been re-located to a new building at the start of session 2001/02. At that time, staff and pupils from other schools which had been closed joined the new school. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 102, with 75 pupils at the primary stages, and 27 in S1 and S2. The secondary was staffed by one full time teacher and a range of visiting teachers. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

The school hosts the local playgroup but does not directly manage the provision. The playgroup was not included as part of the inspection. The education authority's provision for pupils with severe and complex needs from P1 to P3 is situated within the school. It is managed on a day-to-day basis by the school and was included as part of the overall inspection.

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

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils who worked very well together within an inclusive environment and were very proud of their school.
- The wide range of learning opportunities provided for pupils.
- The quality of the accommodation and the facilities.
- Productive parental and community links.
- Strong and purposeful leadership and effective teamwork.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to S2 pupils, and staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents¹ expressed a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school. Many commented on the very positive impact the school had on their children. They commended the staff and leadership of the school for creating a secure and happy environment for learning. Pupils said they were happy at school, had made good friends and appreciated the facilities and opportunities such as after-school clubs and excursions. Teaching and support staff were very positive about all aspects of the school's work. They appreciated working together in a supportive ethos and gained a great deal of satisfaction from their work with pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The overall structure of the curriculum was very good. Teachers in both primary and secondary ensured that pupils had an appropriate breadth and balance of learning opportunities. This included ensuring good progression in most curricular areas from P1 to S2. Additional time was well used to increase curricular provision in, for example, Gaelic. Aspects such as enterprise and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) were well integrated. Staff drew on a good range of contexts across the curriculum for pupils' writing. Pupils with severe and complex needs followed an appropriate curriculum. The overall quality of teaching was good. Teachers had very good relationships with pupils and used a wide variety of approaches to engage them in learning. They gave clear explanations and used homework well to support pupils' learning in class. In the best examples, teachers shared learning intentions very clearly with pupils and summarised with them what they had learned. They made good use of questioning to extend pupils' thinking and assess their understanding. These approaches were not yet consistent across the school. At times, teachers did not allow pupils sufficient opportunities to think for themselves.

The quality of pupils' learning was good overall. Pupils responded well to their teachers and worked very well with each other. In physical education, for example, pupils worked very well in pairs and small groups. Many pupils demonstrated the ability to work on set tasks together responsibly and with minimum supervision. For example, at P3/4 and P6/7, groups worked successfully on reading and discussion tasks without direct adult supervision. Pupils were confident in their use of ICT. Almost all were well motivated and enthusiastic about learning. The overall pace of learning was good for most pupils but too slow for a few. In a few classes, pupils responded well to sustained questioning and challenge designed to extend their thinking but this was not yet consistent across all classes. In French at S2, for example, pupils were very well challenged to use their language skills to the best of their ability. Overall, pupils showed that they were capable of taking on increased responsibility for their learning.

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

There were good examples of pupils' work in art and design. At P1/P2 pupils were making good progress in Gaelic singing and at P3/P4 pupils could identify a range of musical instruments from listening to a piece of music. Pupils had won awards for both enterprise and Eco School work. At the early stages, for example, pupils had designed and produced tickets for a fund-raising event and pupils at S2 had run a film club. Pupils regularly held fund raising events, contributed to a variety of charities and, as a result, developed their understanding of the needs of others. At P6 and P7, pupils developed skills in abseiling, canoeing and teamwork through their participation in a residential experience. From P6 to S2 pupils took on responsibilities for running the school library. At S2, pupils supported younger children's learning effectively and edited the school newsletter. The school council was well engaged with health promotion and had made improvements to school meals practice. A large number of pupils were improving their skills in horticulture, football and scrabble at after-school clubs.

English language and communication

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. There was no consistent pattern of improvement year on year. Most pupils were attaining in line with national levels in listening, talking and reading. The majority were attaining these levels in writing. Most pupils who were not attaining national levels were being well supported and making good progress. Pupils with severe and complex needs were making good progress in developing their communication skills. At P1 and P2, pupils were making very good progress. At all stages, pupils could listen and talk to each other in groups about a range of topics. Most had developed an awareness of different kinds of audience and were developing good skills in presenting. At P4, pupils read factual texts confidently and could identify specific information with ease. At P7 and at S2, pupils could identify how writers used language to create effects. Pupils used the internet confidently to access information but their skills in selecting and using information appropriately were not well enough developed. At all stages, pupils wrote well for a good range of purposes. Many expressed thoughts and feelings very effectively in prose and poetry linked to topic work such as World War II or environmental issues.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. There had been no clear pattern of attainment in recent years. Across the school, most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in information handling, number, money and measurement and shape, position and movement. Those who were not achieving these levels were making appropriate progress from their previous levels of attainment. Pupils with severe and complex needs were developing an awareness of shape and number. For a few higher attaining pupils, the pace of progress was too slow. At all stages, pupils were developing appropriate skills in using computers to handle data. A few pupils in P7 to S2 had made effective use of spreadsheets. Throughout the school, almost all pupils were confident in their written calculations. A few pupils were not sufficiently quick and accurate in their mental calculations. Pupils in the P1 to P5 classes had a sound understanding of the properties of shapes. Most pupils in the P6 to S2 classes were confident in working with angles. At all stages, pupils were developing good skills in problem-solving and enquiry. Most had an appropriate awareness of strategies they could use to solve problems effectively.

Science

The quality of pupils' attainment in science was good overall. At P3/P4, most pupils could describe characteristic features of invertebrates and had produced good written reports. At P5, pupils could recall key features of flowering plants and explain some important properties of plant growth. At P6/P7, pupils showed a good knowledge of different types of rock and understood how they were formed in the Earth's crust. They could describe accurately the procedures for growing crystals. Pupils in S1 understood the different ways in which energy could be stored and transformed into other forms. At S2, pupils had prepared good reports on key properties of chemical elements, and some were applying their ICT skills to enhance their oral presentations. At all stages, pupils were acquiring a range of investigative skills such as observing, making measurements and carrying out practical work safely. In some primary classes, pupils were also developing appropriate skills in planning, interpreting and reporting. At the secondary stages, these skills were not being developed systematically enough. Pupils in S1/S2 were not always confident in interpreting the results of experiments and drawing appropriate conclusions.

Technology

The overall quality of attainment in technology was good. Pupils at all stages were developing a good awareness of the variety of ways in which technology affects their lives. Pupils in P1 to P5 were developing an appropriate understanding of the design process and making items. They used materials such as plastic bricks and card to design and build items according to specified conditions. Pupils in P6 and P7 had developed a good understanding of the importance of rigidity in construction. They had used tools effectively to shape clay models of the Earth's structure. They had also worked successfully with the technical education teacher to design and build well constructed wind gauges as part of their project on weather. Pupils at P4 to S2 were developing a range of useful skills through their work with the home economics teacher. These included learning about fabrics and textures and about hygiene and safety in food preparation. Staff had not yet put a system in place to enable them to evaluate pupils' progress in developing knowledge, understanding and skills in technology from stage to stage.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Staff paid very good attention to pupils' care and welfare and knew pupils very well as individuals. All had recently been trained in child protection procedures and had a good understanding of the action to be taken where necessary. Pupils felt secure and safe in school. They knew that staff would deal with any instances of bullying and most had a good understanding of who they should approach for help with any problems. Staff placed a high emphasis on pupils' social and emotional development. They were responsive to pupils' personal needs and ensured that pupils had regular opportunities to discuss a range of relevant topics. Pupils had a good understanding of issues such as substance misuse, personal relationships and healthy living. Pupils with severe and complex needs were making very good progress in personal and social development. At S1 and S2, an effective system was in place to enable pupils to meet designated tutors on a regular basis to monitor their progress and wellbeing. At S2, pupils had access to good information about subject choices and careers. Effective support arrangements were in place for the transfer of pupils into P1, from P7 to S1 and from S2 to the Nicolson Institute.

Staff paid good attention to meeting pupils' learning needs. Overall the range of learning activities matched pupils' needs and abilities but for a small number of pupils, did not provide a consistently high enough level of challenge. Classroom assistants worked very well with class teachers and the visiting learning support teacher to provide support for pupils' learning in a range of settings. Pupils with additional support needs were making very good progress and, where appropriate, were following suitable individual educational programmes (IEPs). Pupils with severe and complex needs were very well supported and included in the life of the school. They were making good progress and were happy in school. Staff ensured that learning approaches were adapted appropriately to meet their individual needs. Although there were clear IEPs in place, there were no Records of Needs. School staff had sought clarity, over a period of time, about the respective responsibilities of school and education authority staff in relation to the opening and management of Records of Needs but this had not yet been resolved satisfactorily. In particular, there was a lack of clarity as to how the views of all involved with the assessment of pupils with complex additional support needs was coordinated to ensure that their needs were met consistently and effectively as they progressed through school.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Staff made very good use of the excellent facilities available for learning. They used the space in the building very well and were developing the area surrounding the building as an outdoor classroom. Social areas in the school were well used. This included the very good use of the dining room at lunchtimes allowing pupils and staff to share a very positive dining experience. Additional resources such as a multi-sensory room were well used by both the school and other visiting groups. Security arrangements were appropriate. There was very good provision to meet the needs of most disabled users.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Pupils and staff displayed a strong sense of identity with, and pride in, the school. Mutual respect was evident and morale was high. Staff had high expectations for pupils' behaviour and their commitment to learning. Staff did not yet share consistently high expectations for what pupils could achieve. Pupils' behaviour was exemplary and their attitudes to learning were very positive. Pupils with a wide range of needs were respected and well included in the life of the school. This contributed to a well developed understanding on the part of all pupils about the needs of others. Pupils' awareness of issues relating to racial equality was being developed effectively. Pupils had daily opportunities for religious observance. Their achievements were celebrated regularly.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Staff had established very good links with parents and the wider community. They consulted regularly with parents on aspects of school provision in preparation for planning to improve the school's provision and in relation to sensitive health issues. Parents got good information about the ongoing work of the school. This included effective use of the school's website, clear and regular reports on their children's progress, well-produced and informative newsletters and a useful summary of the school's improvement plan. Parents of pupils from P1 to P5 received copies of the school's lunch menu to help their children make appropriate choices. The School Board and PTA were very active in supporting the school. The local playgroup met in the school and was included in many school activities. The school had good links with other schools. This included sharing good practice in learning and teaching. Links with local businesses and agencies supported aspects of learning such as homework and health promotion.

7. Improving the school

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

Sgoil nan Loch provided a good quality of education for its pupils. Staff had responded very well to the opportunities presented by the new building and had successfully created a very positive environment for learning. They had put a wide range of learning opportunities in place and pupils' broader achievements reflected this. They were making good progress towards establishing common approaches to learning and teaching based on best practice. Pupils were keen to learn, their attainment was good overall and staff were committed to improving this further. Links with parents and the community were strong and supportive of further developments.

The headteacher worked very effectively with the depute head to give very good leadership to staff. They shared a high level of professional knowledge and had a clear vision for the ongoing development of the school. In the four years since the school had been re-located, they had established very good teamwork and, with staff, had established a positive climate for self-evaluation. Along with senior managers, staff regularly reflected on their own work and improved their practice. Many took on leadership roles in developing aspects of the curriculum. Two members of staff had very recently taken up the shared role of principal teacher. It was, as yet, too early to evaluate the impact of this role. Staff recognised the need to continue refining their approaches to self-evaluation, and, in particular how they tracked the progress of pupils, in order to have maximum impact on pupils' learning and achievement. Sgoil nan Loch had demonstrated its ability to ensure continuous improvement of its provision and, with the ongoing involvement of pupils and parents, was very well placed to improve even further.

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:

- continue to improve the quality of learning and teaching in order to raise overall attainment further; and
- ensure that the entitlement of pupils with special educational needs to a clear and agreed multi-disciplinary statement of their needs is met.

What happens next?

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this 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 and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Joan Mackay
HM Inspector

24 January 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
Pupils' attainment in science	Good
Pupils' attainment in technology	Good
Overall quality of attainment: S1/S2	Good

How well are pupils supported?	
Pastoral care	Very good
Personal and social development	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	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 out weigh 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.

<p>What parents thought the school did well.</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils and treated their children fairly. • Staff made them feel welcome in school. • Staff encouraged children to work to the best of their ability and gave them helpful information about their children's progress. • The school was well led and had a good reputation in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more information about how they could help their children with homework. • Give a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well.</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They felt safe and secure in the school and enjoyed being there. • They got on well with other pupils. • Teachers explained things clearly, expected them to work to the best of their abilities and helped them when they were having difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the behaviour of some pupils.
<p>What staff thought the school did well.</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was effective communication between senior managers and staff and the school was well led. • They showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • There was mutual respect between staff and pupils, and pupil success was regularly celebrated. • They liked working in the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend support staff's opportunities to be involved in decision making.

How can you contact us?

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