

**Aberlour Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Moray Council**

9 October 2001

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Inspection of Standards and Quality in Aberlour Primary School and Nursery Class The Moray Council

1. Introduction

Aberlour Primary School and its nursery class were inspected in June 2001 as part of a national sample of primary and nursery education.

The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated how well pupils were performing, the effectiveness of the school and how well the school was managed.

HM Inspectors evaluated learning, teaching and attainment, examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation and development planning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, French, mathematics, and physical education within expressive arts.

Members of the inspection team analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents. A member of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

2. The school

The school serves the village of Aberlour and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 161 including 32 children in the nursery class.

Parents' views

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school and the nursery class.

Almost all thought that:

- their children enjoyed being at school and found their work stimulating and challenging;
- their children were encouraged to work to the best of their ability and would be supported if they needed help;
- if they raised a matter of concern the school would do something about it; and
- the school was well led and had a good reputation in the community.

Ethos

The school had a very good ethos. The atmosphere was positive and welcoming. Staff were highly committed to pupils and to the school. Pupils were proud of their school and were consistently polite and well behaved. The school recognised and praised pupils' achievements. Teachers made effective use of praise to reward effort and promote good behaviour. Regular assemblies provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance. Attendance was above national levels.

School and community

The school had established very good relationships with parents, the local playgroup and other schools, educational support services and the wider community. Positive features included:

- very good arrangements for the induction of children into nursery and P1;
- valuable contributions from some parents who were actively involved in helping younger pupils to read;

- very good support from the School Board;
- very useful co-operation with local schools in development work; and
- helpful contacts with local businesses.

Accommodation The quality of accommodation was very good. Classrooms were bright and generally spacious. Pupils' work was attractively displayed. There was an enclosed, safe outdoor play area for the nursery.

Staffing and resources The school was very well staffed. Class teachers were assisted very effectively by a range of support staff.

Resources were good overall. The provision of equipment for information and communications technology was very good. The school library had a good range of fiction and non-fiction books. The headteacher managed the school's devolved budget very effectively to improve resources and staffing.

3. How well are pupils performing?

Nursery In the nursery class children were making very good progress in the key aspects of their development and learning. Their early writing and counting skills were developing well.

Language The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Most pupils performed well in their coursework. However, the pace of progress was too slow in some classes. Pupils at all stages listened attentively and talked confidently. At the upper stages pupils' skills in talking for a range of purposes were not well developed. Most pupils read for enjoyment and showed good skills in reading for information. Although pupils at all stages wrote for a variety of purposes, their ability to structure

their writing was not yet sufficiently developed. In *listening* and *talking* almost all pupils at the early and middle stages, and most at the upper stages, were achieving appropriate national levels. At all stages most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in *reading*. In *writing* most pupils at the early and middle stages, but only a majority at the upper stages, were achieving appropriate national levels. As a result of good early intervention practices a considerable number of pupils in P2 were achieving very highly, particularly in writing.

Pupils in P5/6 and P6/7 were learning French. The overall quality of attainment was good. Most pupils had a thorough knowledge of what they had been taught and were developing good listening and speaking skills. They were developing basic skills in reading and writing. In P6/7 they successfully used their very good knowledge of French numbers to perform mental calculations.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils performed very well in most aspects of coursework, but sometimes the tasks they were given lacked challenge. Almost all pupils could interpret a range of graphs. In P6/7 almost all pupils were confident when using the computer to handle data. At all stages most pupils were able to carry out mental and written calculations accurately. However, in P7 some pupils had difficulties working with fractions and decimals. Almost all pupils at the early stages and most at the middle stages were achieving appropriate national levels in *information handling, number, money and measurement* and *shape, position and movement*. Only a majority at the upper stages were achieving appropriate national levels. Pupils' skills in *problem solving and enquiry* were very limited.

Physical education

The overall quality of attainment in physical education was fair. Pupils performed well in their coursework, but skills were not developed systematically enough from stage to stage. At the early stages pupils co-operated well

in groups to develop their ball handling skills. At the middle stages they were making good progress in developing and controlling their speed when jogging and sprinting. In the upper stages they were beginning to develop skills in evaluating their own performance and that of others.

Information and communications technology

The following were notable features of pupils' proficiency in information and communications technology (ICT).

- In the nursery almost all were making good progress in learning to control a computer mouse.
- By P3 most pupils could send and receive e-mail.
- In the upper stages almost all pupils were confident in using the internet for research.

4. How good is the curriculum?

The good curriculum offered all pupils a broad and balanced experience. However, programmes of work in primary classes generally required further development.

Nursery

The overall quality of the curriculum in the nursery class was very good. The programme for communication and language was very good. Staff provided well-judged opportunities for the development of early reading and writing skills. The programme in knowledge and understanding of the world was good. Staff organised a range of stimulating activities to encourage early mathematical skills and made effective use of the local environment to extend children's experiences.

Language

The programme in English language was fair overall. Pupils had good opportunities to read for enjoyment and information. They had insufficient opportunities to

discuss books they had read. The school had made recent improvements to the writing programme by ensuring that pupils had increased opportunities to write at length. Although teachers provided some good listening and talking activities there was no formal programme to ensure that pupils made systematic progress.

The programme in French was fair overall. Although teachers provided generally good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, the range of topics covered was too narrow. Staff had recently begun to develop the programme in order to provide a more detailed outline of the language pupils were expected to learn from year to year.

Mathematics

The programme in mathematics was good. Pupils had appropriate opportunities for practical activities, and had good access to computer databases and spreadsheets for handling data. The programme placed a suitable emphasis on skills of mental calculation. However, too little attention was given to teaching strategies for problem solving.

Physical education

The programme in physical education was fair. Class teachers provided some good opportunities for pupils to develop skills. However, there was insufficient guidance for staff to ensure that pupils received a broad experience and made appropriate progress.

Expressive arts

The overall programme in expressive arts was fair. It did not ensure the systematic development of pupils' knowledge and skills throughout the school. The school had correctly identified the need to develop programmes in art and design, music, drama and physical education.

5. How good is learning and teaching?

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good. The lessons seen ranged from very good to fair. Most were good or better. Further information about lesson evaluations is given in the appendix.

Teachers were well organised and planned their work conscientiously. However, the lack of effective whole-school procedures for planning and assessing coursework resulted in inconsistent practice from stage to stage.

- Staff in the nursery had developed effective procedures for planning, assessing and recording children's progress.
- Staff in the nursery interacted very well with the children and intervened effectively to extend their learning. Children were highly motivated and co-operated very well with one another.
- In primary classes teachers provided clear explanations and instructions. There was some very good direct teaching to the whole class, groups and individuals.
- Pupils were enthusiastic and motivated learners. They worked well with partners and in small groups without close supervision.
- Most teachers matched tasks well to pupils' needs in mathematics. In other curricular areas weaknesses in programmes limited pupils' progress. Some pupils required more challenging activities in line with their needs and abilities.
- Teachers had a good informal knowledge of pupils' strengths and needs. National Tests were used to

confirm their views of pupils' attainment. However, they were not always given when pupils were ready to sit them. Overall, assessment and recording procedures were not sufficiently rigorous or systematic.

6. How well are pupils supported?

Care and welfare Staff provided good support for pupils' care and welfare. They knew their pupils well and were aware of any difficulties which they met in the classroom or more widely in the community. Child protection procedures were not clear enough to be used effectively.

Personal and social development In the nursery class staff gave good attention to developing children's confidence and self-esteem. In the primary classes they encouraged pupils' personal and social development by recognising and valuing their achievements. Pupils responded very well to class responsibilities. The good programme of health education included aspects of hygiene, personal safety, and drugs and sex education.

Support for learning Pupils were well supported by their class teachers. Learning support staff interacted very well with individuals and small groups experiencing learning difficulties in English language and mathematics. However, their work was not well co-ordinated. They did not work sufficiently closely with class teachers and did not have enough involvement in co-operative teaching. Records of Needs were regularly reviewed. Arrangements to support pupils' learning were fair overall.

7. How well is the school managed?

Overall management and leadership

The headteacher provided good leadership. During his three years in post, he had established a caring, happy atmosphere throughout the school. He had won the respect of pupils, parents and staff. He had ensured that development tasks were carried out effectively. He now needed to take a more direct role in the management of the curriculum and quality assurance.

The senior teacher offered good support to the headteacher and carried out her agreed remit well.

The school had an appropriate statement of aims which had been drawn up with the involvement of staff and shared with parents. They provided a good basis for planning and evaluating the work of the school. However, policies required further development to provide clearer guidance to staff and for monitoring the school's work.

Staff development and review

Staff had benefited from very good staff development activities which were well matched to school priorities. All had received training in the use of ICT. Teaching staff had had their work reviewed under the education authority's scheme for staff development and review.

School development planning

The school development plan was well constructed. It indicated clearly the main targets, including those for the nursery class, and how they would be implemented. Audit procedures were not thorough enough. Good progress had been made in most projects.

Approaches to improving quality

The school had produced a useful report which evaluated important areas of its work. Staff had referred to national performance indicators to take a broad view of aspects of the school's provision. However, the process was not sufficiently rigorous. The headteacher received teachers' plans, but did not provide evaluative comment on them.

Although he had visited classes, he did not monitor the quality of learning and teaching systematically enough. The school's procedures for self-evaluation were fair.

8. How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the school provided a good standard of education. The headteacher and staff were highly committed and had taken effective steps to improve the school's work in a number of key areas. The school now needed to focus on raising attainment further by improving programmes of study and planning more effectively to meet pupils' needs.

Key strengths

- The high quality of the curriculum and the very good interaction between staff and children in the nursery.
- The very positive ethos throughout the nursery and school.
- The strong links with parents, the School Board and the wider community.
- Consistently very good teaching in some classes.
- Very good procedures for the management of the devolved budget and staff development and review.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should act on the following recommendations.

- Programmes for English language, French, the expressive arts and problem solving and enquiry within mathematics should be improved to ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in all the key skills.

- Staff should develop a coherent system of planning which sets out clearly the knowledge and skills pupils are expected to acquire.
- Teachers should ensure that all tasks set for pupils are appropriate and sufficiently challenging.
- The school should improve procedures for assessing and recording pupils' progress.
- The school should clarify its child protection procedures and ensure that staff are trained to implement them properly.
- Arrangements for co-ordinating the work of staff in support for learning should be improved.
- The headteacher should implement a more rigorous approach to quality assurance. In particular, he should monitor the quality of pupils' learning and attainment more systematically.

HM Inspectors will return between one and two years after the publication of this report to assess progress in meeting these recommendations. The school and education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main points for action in the report and to share that plan with parents.

Anne Park
HM Inspector
on behalf of HM Chief Inspector
Northern Division

9 October 2001

See Performance Indicator data overleaf.

Appendix

Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be *very good*

- The school's ethos
- Communication with parents
- Partnership with parents and the School Board
- Provision of accommodation and facilities
- Provision of staff
- The school's management of devolved finances
- Implementation of Special Educational Needs legislation
- The school's arrangements for development and review of its staff

We judged the following to be *good*

- Provision of materials and equipment
- The structure of the curriculum
- Quality of the teaching process
- Quality of pupils' learning
- Quality of pastoral care
- Personal and social development
- Effectiveness of leadership of the school
- Effectiveness of promoted staff and senior teachers
- The school development plan
- Implementing the school development plan

We judged the following to be *fair*

- Quality of courses or programmes
- Quality of teachers' planning
- Matching the teaching process to pupils' needs and experience
- Using assessment to guide the teaching process
- Effectiveness of the learning support
- The school's approach to evaluating its own work

We judged the following to be *unsatisfactory*

- No aspects were found to be in this category

Quality of lessons observed

HMI also evaluated the quality of the lessons observed. The overall quality of lessons was very good in 41% of cases, good in 41% and fair in 18%. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Educational Services, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from the address below or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our web site: www.scotland.gov.uk/hmie

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 George Gray, Acting HMCI whose address is given below. If you are unhappy with the response, you will be told in writing what further steps you may take.

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