

**Achfary Primary School
Sutherland
The Highland Council
11 December 2007**

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1. Background

Achfary Primary School was inspected in September 2007 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 innovation, and its 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 and staff. Members of the inspection team also met a number of parents¹. There was no Parent Council.

The school serves the village of Achfary and the surrounding area of Sutherland. At the time of the inspection the roll was six. There were no pupils at the P1-P3 stages. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was above the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Enthusiastic pupils who were keen to learn.
- High quality teaching which helped pupils improve.
- Attainment of pupils in English language, and pupils' abilities in using information and communications technology (ICT).
- Staff's provision of care and welfare for pupils.
- Links with parents and the wider community.
- The teamwork of all staff, and the overall leadership of the headteacher.

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 all of the questionnaires normally appears in Appendix 2. However, as there were fewer than five respondees in the group of parents, in order to maintain confidentiality, that analysis is not provided.

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

HM Inspectors also interviewed staff, parents and pupils during the inspection. The following is an analysis of the views expressed by staff, parents and pupils. Almost all parents, pupils and staff were very positive about the school, and felt that it was very well led. Parents felt that their children enjoyed being in school, and that the staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. They believed that staff were always approachable, and that they would respond appropriately when given information affecting pupils. All felt welcome in the school. Pupils were happy in the school, and felt that they were helped to improve. They believed that they were treated fairly, and that behaviour was good. They also felt safe and well looked after. Staff enjoyed being in school, and felt very well supported by the headteacher. They believed that pupils were enthusiastic about their learning. They also felt that there was mutual respect between themselves and pupils.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Staff provided a very wide range of learning experiences for pupils which successfully developed their knowledge, skills and understanding in key areas of the curriculum. Teachers used time very effectively to ensure that an appropriate focus was given to the expressive arts. Appropriate time was available to allow pupils to travel to a range of events and field trips. These activities all helped to develop the social skills of pupils. Teaching programmes were very well organised and had a positive impact on pupils' learning, particularly in science and writing in English language. The school had been awarded Health Promoting School status and pupils were well aware of what was required for a healthy lifestyle. Pupils benefited from two hours per week of physical activity. All pupils had been involved in the school gaining an Eco School (Scotland) award. They were actively involved in recycling and understood the necessity to care for the environment. Their involvement with the Eco School project had helped them focus on key areas of citizenship, as well as involving them in helpful enterprise activities. The overall quality of teaching was very good. Teachers were very well prepared and used questioning very effectively to encourage pupils to think for themselves. They explained clearly to pupils what they expected them to learn, and also reviewed what they had done to check their levels of understanding. Teachers also used ICT effectively as part of their teaching. Visiting teachers made an important contribution to pupils' learning in key areas of the curriculum including art and design, music, physical education (PE), science and writing. Homework was set regularly and was suitably varied. Overall, the quality of teaching in the school generated an enthusiasm for learning amongst pupils.

Pupils were enthusiastic and well motivated learners. They settled to their tasks quickly, and cooperated very well with one another. Older pupils willingly helped younger ones develop their skills, for example, in ICT. The pace of pupils' work was very good and, as a result, pupils were making very good progress. Pupils were accustomed to working independently and making some decisions for themselves. They were making particularly good progress in using ICT. They were capable of editing texts on screen, and were involved in creating an animated film using a digital camera and computer program. They participated with enthusiasm in PE where they were beginning to develop good ball skills. They were developing good skills in drawing and shading in art. In science, they were developing their knowledge and understanding of conductors and insulators through their experimentation with circuits. Although their study of World War II had only recently

begun they were developing a good knowledge of evacuees, the events which led to the war, and key national figures.

The school took very good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Pupils participated in the after school drama club, and all had enjoyed their performance to the local community. Members of the community commented positively on the pupils' musical performance at the school prize giving. Some pupils took part in a shinty club organised at a neighbouring school. A few pupils had their poems published in a commercial publication, and all had been involved in raising funds for a Highland hospice.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment, and making very good progress. Higher attaining pupils had made particularly good progress in reading, and were producing writing of very high quality using a wide range of vocabulary. Pupils listened very well to one another and adults and responded appropriately. They were very articulate when talking with adults, and gave clear description of texts they had read and work they had undertaken. Pupils read widely and were fluent while reading aloud. They had a good understanding of what they had read, and appreciated the styles of different writers. The standards in reading of a few pupils were very high, and they read a wide range of texts. Pupils wrote a range of prose and poetry for a wide variety of purposes. They organised their writing very effectively, and created pieces of texts which were interesting and captured the attention of the reader. Overall the writing was of a very high standard. Standards of handwriting and presentation were also very good.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment and making good progress. They had a good understanding of a range of graphs and had created a number of them using the computer. Older pupils could use scales on the axes of graphs effectively. Their skills in using databases and spreadsheets were at an early stage of development. Pupils had a good understanding of a range of numbers and carried out written calculations accurately. They were developing good skills in mental calculation. They were not consistently quick and accurate in multiplying and dividing mentally. They had a good knowledge of units of measurement and could use both the twelve and twenty-four hour clock. They also had a good recall of the names and properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. They were aware of the strategies required to tackle problems, and now required more practice in deciding which of these to use.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Staff had a very good knowledge of pupils' progress and their varying needs, and took appropriate action to address identified support needs. Teaching programmes were targeted appropriately and, as a result, pupils were making very good progress. Assessments had been well used to confirm teachers' judgements of pupils' attainment. Discussions had taken place with staff from the local secondary school to help provide appropriate resources for higher attaining pupils in reading. Pupils with additional support needs had been well supported and helped become more confident and self assured. The time was now

appropriate, however, to create individualised educational programmes for such pupils in order to target their needs and monitor their progress more formally. The school was well supported by the area learning support coordinator.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>Arrangements for the care and welfare of pupils were excellent. Staff used their knowledge of pupils' social, emotional and personal needs very effectively to help pupils cooperate with one another and develop good relationships. They had discussed anti-bullying with pupils as part of the health and religious and moral education programmes. Staff had taken effective steps to deal with any incidents of inappropriate behaviour. They cooperated with parents very effectively to provide care when necessary for pupils with allergies. Staff had undergone appropriate training, and had carried out effective risk assessments to ensure pupils' safety on school trips. The school nurse had also discussed allergic reactions with all pupils to help them understand and support others. All staff had been trained in child protection.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The school's accommodation was good overall and was located within the community hall. Pupils and staff benefited from a well appointed classroom, kitchen, spacious hall and headteacher's office. Staff had created a stimulating learning environment in the classroom. They made very good use of the display of pupils' work to encourage pupils to produce work of high quality. Pupils and staff had improved the school grounds through the creation of a kitchen garden and a wildlife garden as part of a 'Grounds for Learning' project. Pupils had grown, harvested and, with the assistance of the school cook, eaten their own produce. Both gardens had helped pupils observe and become more aware of the birdlife in the area. Security arrangements were appropriate. There was no provision for access to the school for those with physical disabilities. Staff were required to use pupils' toilets.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The overall ethos within the school was very good. Pupils, parents and staff were very proud of their school. Pupils were very polite and friendly, and courteous with visitors. Relationships were good, and there was a great deal of respect between pupils and staff. Pupils behaved well, and persevered at their activities. Staff morale was high, and there was a very good spirit of teamwork within the school. Pupils took part in weekly religious observance. Staff set clear expectations of the pupils and expected them to produce work of a high standard. Overall, pupils responded very well to these expectations. Although there was no Pupil Council, all pupils were members of the eco committee. This had a positive impact on their attitudes to the local environment. All pupils were very well included in the life of the school. Staff and pupils helped new pupils settle quickly into the school. Pupils had a good understanding of the issues of tolerance and respect for others, and were aware of issues of anti-racism.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>Links with parents and the wider community were very good. Although there was no Parent Council, parents supported the school very well in a number of ways. Staff discussed pupils with parents on a regular, informal basis and also produced very informative written reports for parents. The school provided regular newsletters and sought parents' views on aspects of the school's provision. Parents were invited to view the resources used for the teaching of sensitive health issues. The local community was very supportive of the school, with a community volunteer helping on trips and assisting pupils to maintain the school gardens. There were good links with Kinlochberrie High School and other schools in the area. Arrangements were being made to restart the group meetings of headteachers of small schools to support further headteachers and staff.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Achfary Primary School provided a very high quality of education for its pupils. Staff provided a very good curriculum and the quality of teaching helped develop pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Pupils were making very good progress in their learning, and achieved high levels of attainment in writing in particular. The staff met the needs of all pupils effectively, and now required to formalise the programmes required for pupils with additional support needs.

The headteacher had the respect of parents, pupils and staff. She was a very effective leader and manager who had worked successfully to provide a stimulating curriculum for pupils. She had determined and implemented appropriate priorities within the school in order to make improvements. In all of these efforts she had been very well supported by a staff who worked very well together. She had a very good knowledge of pupils' progress, and now required to refine her procedures for quality assurance by monitoring more formally the quality of learning and teaching. Overall, the school had demonstrated that it had the capacity to improve.

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:

- develop individualised educational programmes for pupils with additional support needs; and
- raise attainment in mathematics.

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. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Dr Roddy Duncan
HM Inspector

11 December 2007

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	very good
Pupils' learning experiences	very good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	excellent
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents and the community	very good

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Self-evaluation	good

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
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. As fewer than five responses were received from parents, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They enjoyed being at school, and were told when they had done something well.• They felt that they were treated fairly, and felt safe and well looked after.• Teachers expected them to work hard, and helped them keep safe and healthy.	<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">• Almost all staff were positive about most aspects of the school.	<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

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.

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management and Communications Team, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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