

**Abernethy Primary School
Perth & Kinross Council
15 February 2005**

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1. Background

Abernethy Primary School was inspected in November 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, 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-teacher association (PTA), and a group of parents.

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 Abernethy and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 122, including 39 in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was well above the national average.

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, which will be published at the same time as the primary report.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Varied and effective teaching approaches in mathematics.
- The development of pupils' skills in technology, and in using information and communications technology (ICT).
- The quality of care and welfare provided to pupils by all staff.
- Pupils' behaviour and positive attitudes towards schoolwork.
- The school's successful efforts to promote the inclusion of all pupils.
- The headteacher's monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, 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.

A majority of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. In both questionnaires and discussions, they showed that they were generally very pleased with the school. In particular, they commented positively on their children's relationships with staff and their enjoyment of school. Around a quarter of them wanted the school to set higher standards for pupils' attainment and to provide more information for them about the school's priorities for improving pupils' education. Pupils were generally positive about the school, in particular their relationships with teachers and other pupils. The majority felt that pupils behaved well, and that staff were good at dealing with bullies. They thought that pupils were treated fairly, and that the school helped to sort things out if they were upset. Teachers and support staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the school. All who responded felt that the school was well led and that pupils were well behaved. Some teachers were unhappy about the small size and sound-proofing of classrooms.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

Pupils benefited from a broad and well-balanced curriculum. In most areas of the curriculum, programmes of work were well constructed to enable pupils to make steady progress in their learning. Most of the work done by pupils was appropriately challenging, especially at P3 to P7. Play activities were well organised at P1. The curriculum took good account of national priorities in education, especially in developing pupils' skills in numeracy, ICT, citizenship and enterprise. Teachers planned lessons carefully and varied their teaching approaches well, especially during mathematics lessons. Almost all of the time, they focused pupils' attention effectively and gave clear directions and explanations. Their interactions with pupils were good overall, and were of high quality in some lessons seen at P3 to P6. However, teachers did not explain to pupils systematically enough the key knowledge and skills they expected them to learn. Despite some very good examples, the use of homework across classes was inconsistent.

Teachers used varied displays, including examples of pupils' work, to help provide a stimulating environment for learning. They ensured that pupils were actively involved in the learning process. Very good examples of this were seen in mathematics lessons across the stages and during a class debate in P5/P6. In practical technology work, pupils produced effective design solutions in P4/P5, and were developing a wide range of skills in using tools at P7. In physical education at P1, the visiting specialist teacher ensured that pupils were active, busy and challenged. Pupils' skills in using ICT for a variety of purposes were well developed across the stages. Pupils showed positive attitudes towards learning and almost all were well motivated and focused on their work. They organised themselves well during lessons, and almost all were good at

taking responsibility for their learning and working independently. They responded well to regular opportunities to work together in groups. Older pupils required further opportunities to develop their independent research skills, and their creativity in art and technology. On most occasions, the pace of pupils' progress was good or very good. At the early stages, the pace of progress was sometimes too slow, especially for abler pupils.

Pupils were friendly, courteous and co-operative, and showed good levels of self-esteem. The use of personal learning plans (PLPs) was helping to raise their confidence and expectations of themselves. They displayed inclusive attitudes towards new pupils and those with different cultural backgrounds or with additional support needs. Pupils responded positively to a wide range of opportunities to accept responsibility. They helped in the classroom and nursery, acted as playground 'peacemakers', library assistants and junior road safety officers. A number served on the school council and on the Eco School committee which was organising the school's efforts to gain an award for caring for the environment. Commendably, pupils had won a gold award from Careers Scotland for their participation in enterprise activities. Pupils achieved considerable success in local basketball, cross-country and orienteering competitions against other schools.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and the majority were achieving them in writing. Some pupils were exceeding these levels. In recent years, standards had improved in reading, although not in writing. Pupils' progress in these aspects was good at the middle and upper stages, but had not been fast enough for some pupils at the early stages. The school was unable to provide complete and reliable evidence of pupils' attainment in listening and talking. In class, however, pupils generally listened attentively and responded well to teachers' explanations and instructions. At P5 to P7, they were developing good skills in listening and in responding to one another in group discussions and class debates. Most pupils were developing fluency and good understanding in their reading. Across the school, pupils were developing some good writing skills, although not in a wide enough range of contexts.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Most pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in key aspects of mathematics. Attainment was best at the upper stages where good numbers of pupils were exceeding national levels. Too few had been exceeding minimum national expectations at the early stages, although this was now improving. From the early stages, pupils showed well-developed skills in collecting and presenting information, including the use of ICT to handle data. They were confident with most aspects of number work and generally performed mental calculations well. At the upper stages, pupils showed variable skill in applying quick methods in mental calculations, and in working with fractions and volume measurements. Pupils showed good knowledge of shapes, but were less secure with angles. Their skills in problem solving and enquiry were good overall.

5. How well are pupils supported?

All staff showed high levels of care and commitment towards pupils. Effective procedures were in place for child protection, including appropriate arrangements for staff training. Instances of bullying were dealt with effectively but were not recorded systematically enough. The school had effective procedures which enabled pupils to inform staff about any concerns they had. They benefited from a wide variety of activities to promote their health and fitness. The school's comprehensive health education programme effectively encouraged pupils to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. It was well supported by close links with external agencies including the school nurse and Active Schools co-ordinator. Pupils were knowledgeable about nutrition and valued the social experience of eating together at lunchtimes. Effective pastoral arrangements were in place to ease children's transition from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school.

Pupils were well supported by classroom staff and the support for learning teacher. Class teachers matched tasks appropriately to the needs of most pupils in English language and mathematics, but less well in other curriculum areas. Some tasks set for pupils at the early stages lacked challenge. Pupils benefited from the use of PLPs which included specific learning targets to help them improve their work in English language and mathematics. The school had effective procedures for identifying and meeting the needs of pupils who required additional support. In consultation with class teachers, the support for learning teacher gave valuable help to these pupils. She provided an appropriate range of activities and systematically assessed and recorded pupils' progress. The classroom assistant and support for learning auxiliaries provided well-judged and sensitive support for individuals and groups. Individualised educational programmes (IEPs) had been devised for pupils with significant additional support needs. These IEPs contained suitably specific learning targets and were shared appropriately with parents. Records of Needs were reviewed appropriately, although some of the documentation required better organisation. IEPs for some pupils with Records of Needs gave insufficient attention to longer-term targets for their personal and social development. Pupils receiving additional support were making good progress in their learning.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	Opened in 2002, the school building was modern and attractive. The interior was bright and very well furnished. It included a spacious hall, very good office accommodation, ample storage and good provision of computers. Outdoor play areas were of high quality, although some parts experienced flooding in wet weather. The teaching areas provided limited space for older pupils, restricting the use of resources. Inadequate sound-proofing between classrooms reduced the quality of pupils' learning. However, this matter was being investigated by the

Aspect	Comment
	<p>education authority with a view to making improvements. Lessons taught in the hall were sometimes disrupted as the area acted as a thoroughfare to and from classrooms.</p>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Pupils identified strongly with their school. Staff worked very well together, and applied effective strategies to ensure pupils' good behaviour. Pupils behaved very well overall and related positively to staff and one another. They had various opportunities to give their views about the school. Staff used praise effectively, and pupils were well motivated by opportunities to gain points for good work and conduct. Pupils' achievements were celebrated. Targets set for pupils in their PLPs helped them to develop aspects of their attainment. However, teachers' expectations of pupils were not always high enough, especially at the early stages. The school had a strongly inclusive ethos. It made real and effective efforts to promote equality and fairness and pupils' understanding of other cultures and faiths. Pupils' opportunities for religious observance were not frequent enough.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The school actively encouraged the involvement of parents and communicated with them effectively. Parents attended school events in large numbers and some regularly worked as parent helpers. The school encouraged parents to be partners in their children's learning and welfare. Communication about health-related matters, including healthy eating, was particularly effective. PLPs provided regular information to parents about their children's progress. By contrast, the annual reports to parents gave a less clear picture of pupils' individual performance. Parents received clear information about the school's priorities for improvement. The supportive School Board and PTA had close links with the school. The School Board took a particular interest in pupils' health, including the quality of school meals. Some parents were unclear about the work done by the School Board. The school benefited from the wide range of links it had developed with the local community and various support services.</p>

7. Improving the school

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

Overall, the school provided a good environment for learning. The atmosphere throughout the school was orderly and positive and pupils were very well looked after. Most areas of the curriculum were well developed. Standards of teaching were good overall, and often very good. Pupils were well motivated, but would benefit from clearer indication of what they are expected to learn in all lessons. Some tasks set for pupils were not sufficiently well matched to their needs. Whilst pupils achieved good levels of success, there remained scope to improve their attainment, particularly in writing.

The headteacher provided good leadership. She had a strong presence in the school and pupils, parents and staff found her approachable. Her communication was generally effective. She had involved staff well in decision-making, and had developed effective teamwork in reviewing and improving the curriculum. In making further improvements to the school, staff required to be more focused on key issues, including the overall pattern of pupils' attainment. The headteacher had ensured a positive attitude amongst staff to school self-evaluation. Together, they were well involved in evaluating various aspects of the school's work, taking good account of the views of pupils and parents. The headteacher carefully tracked each pupil's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and intervened, as necessary, in response to pupils' needs. However, the school had not yet developed systematic approaches to recording and monitoring pupils' attainment in listening and talking. The headteacher monitored effectively the quality of teachers' planning and checked samples of pupils' written work. Her monitoring of learning and teaching, although systematic, had yet to ensure consistent pace and challenge for pupils at the early stages. Potential existed to share and extend the very good practice in learning and teaching observed in some classes. Overall, the school showed good capacity to review and improve its work.

Main points for action

The school and education authority should take action to improve some aspects related to the quality of learning, teaching and attainment. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- ensure that the key knowledge and skills that pupils are expected to learn is systematically shared with them during lessons;
- improve the meeting of pupils' needs in areas of the curriculum beyond English language and mathematics to take account of their different ages and abilities;
- ensure consistent pace and challenge for all pupils at the early stages;
- improve attainment in writing; and
- improve the sound-proofing of classrooms.

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.

Tom Straiton
HM Inspector

15 February 2005

Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

We judged the following to be very good

- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the School Board and the community

We judged the following to be good

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Accommodation and facilities
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Leadership
- Self-evaluation

We judged the following to be fair

- No aspects were found to be in this category

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"> • Their children enjoyed being at school and were treated fairly. • The school buildings were kept in good order. • There was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Staff showed concern for their children's care and welfare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations by teachers of pupils' attainment. • Information about the school's priorities for improving pupils' education.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one teacher knew them well. • Teachers expected them to work to the best of their ability. • They got on well with other pupils. • The school helped them to keep themselves safe and healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fair treatment of pupils. • Standards of pupil behaviour.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of pupils. • Pupils' success was regularly celebrated. • Indiscipline was dealt with effectively. • Standards set for pupils' behaviour were consistently upheld by staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The size and sound-proofing of teaching areas.

How can you contact us?

If you would like an additional copy of this report

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