

**Fettercairn School
and Nursery Class
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Aberdeenshire Council
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1. Background

Fettercairn School and Nursery Class were inspected in May 2008 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 nursery children's and 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 the quality of the children's experience in the nursery, pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Parent Council 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 Fettercairn and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 47, including 15 children in the nursery class. 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.

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Confident, well-behaved nursery children and friendly, responsible pupils.
- Positive relationships between staff and pupils.
- The quality of pastoral care.
- The commitment of staff to developing effective partnerships with parents, the local community and other agencies to enhance pupils' learning.

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.

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

Parents were very pleased with all aspects of nursery provision and with almost all aspects of the work of the primary classes. They felt welcome in school and thought that the headteacher and staff were very approachable. They thought their children enjoyed school and that the school was well led. Pupils thought they had a say in deciding how to make the school better and that the school was good at promoting healthy lifestyles. A few thought that the behaviour of some pupils was not good. Staff enjoyed working in the school. They thought that teamwork was very good and that the headteacher was very caring and supportive towards pupils and staff.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Learners' experiences

The curriculum in the nursery provided children with a broad range of appropriate experiences across the five key aspects of learning. Children had insufficient opportunities to play and learn outside. In the primary classes, the quality of the curriculum was satisfactory. Staff provided a broad range of activities. The curriculum did not always provide appropriate continuity and progression in pupils' learning, in particular in the development of reading skills. The additional time allocated to raising attainment in literacy and numeracy had not been successful. Pupils benefited from two hours of physical education each week and visiting teachers of art and music enhanced pupils' creativity. Staff were effectively developing pupils' enterprise and citizenship skills and had begun to place more emphasis on using information and communications technology (ICT) to support pupils' learning. There was scope to develop this further. Pupils at the early stages had insufficient opportunities to learn through play. The overall quality of teaching was satisfactory. In the nursery, staff had developed very positive relationships with children and were caring and respectful in their interactions. Praise was used well to celebrate children's achievements and raise their self-esteem. Staff made effective use of questioning and discussion to encourage children's thinking and develop their ideas. In the primary classes, teachers gave clear explanations and instructions. They used praise well to motivate pupils and questioned them carefully to check for understanding. They did not yet consistently share the purpose of lessons with pupils. Too often, pupils did not know what they needed to do to improve their work. Teachers were still at an early stage of setting targets for pupils' learning and involving pupils in evaluating their progress. Homework was linked to classwork and was set regularly.

Learners' experiences in the nursery class were good. Almost all children were motivated by a wide range of interesting learning opportunities. They were developing confidence in initiating their own learning and selecting resources. Staff consulted children about aspects of their learning and valued their contributions. Children needed more opportunities to be active and independent in their learning. Learners' experiences in the primary classes were satisfactory. Most pupils persevered to complete the tasks set for them. A few did not remain on task at all times and their work rate was too slow. When they were actively involved in their learning they were highly motivated and the climate for learning was purposeful and productive. Too often pupils were passive learners, completing worksheets and textbook exercises. They did not have sufficient opportunities to work together or take responsibility for their learning.

Improvements in performance

The school had some success in improving performance. In the nursery and primary classes, staff had successfully supported pupils in learning about health promotion and environmental education. Staff in the nursery involved children in reviewing what they learned each day and this had made them more aware of their own achievements. Staff in the primary classes had made a start to improving approaches to assessing pupils' learning and setting targets for groups and individuals. This work had not yet led to any significant impact on pupils' experiences and attainment in English language and mathematics. Overall, this amounted to a good improvement in performance in the nursery class and a satisfactory improvement in performance in the primary classes.

Children in the nursery class were making good progress in the development of communication and language skills. Most were confident when talking to one another and other adults. Many enjoyed talking about their experiences. They followed instructions well and enjoyed listening to stories. They were encouraged to take books home to share with parents. Most children recognised their own name in print and enjoyed experimenting with mark making. Staff did not always ensure that children had sufficient opportunities to develop writing skills in all areas of the playroom.

In the primary classes, the overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was satisfactory. The majority of pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment in listening, reading and writing and most were achieving them in talking. The school did not have sufficiently reliable information on pupils' attainment in reading and writing. Pupils did not perform consistently at the levels they had achieved. Most pupils listened attentively and responded appropriately to adults. Their skills in contributing to discussions were less well developed and they interrupted one another too often. Pupils across the school read fluently from familiar texts but were less confident in analysing the author's use of language. Pupils at the early stages had made a good start to developing their writing skills. At the middle and upper stages, pupils were developing editing and drafting skills. Across the school, pupils were not developing independent research skills effectively enough.

Children in the nursery class were making satisfactory progress in the development of early mathematical skills. Almost all children had an understanding of time sequences that related to the nursery day. Most were able to count confidently and recognise numbers. A few used appropriate mathematical language in play situations. They had insufficient opportunities to develop their understanding of simple mathematical concepts during play activities.

In the primary classes, the quality of attainment in mathematics was satisfactory. A majority of pupils across the school were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. A few were achieving them earlier than might have been expected. Most pupils with additional support needs were making appropriate progress. For too many pupils, the pace of progress was too slow. Across the school, pupils were able to create and interpret an appropriate range of graphs. They were confident in carrying out written and mental calculations but pupils in P4 to P7 were too slow in working with multiplication facts. At all stages, pupils could identify and discuss an appropriate

range of two- and three-dimensional shapes. They required more practice in selecting strategies to solve problems.

Children in the nursery class were making good progress in understanding the world around them. They were learning about the natural world and new growth through planting and caring for vegetables. Children participated imaginatively in role-play. They were developing creativity through learning how to mix paints, collage and model making materials. They had insufficient opportunities to experiment creatively in music. Children would benefit from regular access to outdoor energetic play.

In the primary classes, pupils demonstrated their creativity in a wide variety of drawings, paintings and clay models. They were creating an attractive mural to decorate the toilet walls. They used their enterprise skills effectively to design and make re-usable bags which they planned to sell to raise funds for charity. Across the school, pupils enjoyed learning French. Environmental studies topic work did not ensure the systematic development of pupils' knowledge and skills.

Nursery and school staff were taking good steps to encourage learners' wider achievements. Children in the nursery were happy and confident. They were familiar with basic nursery routines and were learning to share and take turns when playing. Most were developing friendships and were independent when undertaking personal tasks. At the primary stages, pupils developed skills in music and drama through presenting concerts for their parents and the local community. They had recently organised a 'Burns Lunch' to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. They took part in a range of sporting activities, organised by the Active Schools Coordinator. They were learning about healthy lifestyles through their work towards gaining accreditation as a Health Promoting School. They used their enterprise skills well to raise funds for charities. Pupils were learning about environmental and sustainability issues through their work in achieving an Eco Schools Scotland silver award. Across the school, pupils exercised responsibility through a range of activities, including acting as playground buddies and serving as members of the pupil council and the Eco Schools committee.

The school had made satisfactory progress in overtaking the priorities in its improvement plan. Overall, the rate of progress was too slow and the school had not been successful in raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff were highly committed to improving the quality of education provided. Their efforts were hampered by a lack of detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Approaches to meeting learners' needs were satisfactory. Staff in the nursery knew children well and gathered a range of assessment information. They did not use this information effectively enough to track children's progress in their learning or to clearly identify next steps in learning. In the primary classes, tasks were not always well matched to pupils' individual learning needs. Assessment information, including information about prior learning in the nursery, was not used effectively enough to

ensure an appropriate rate of progress for all pupils. Support staff provided good support for teachers and pupils but they were not always deployed to best effect. Pupils requiring additional help were well supported by the visiting support for learning teacher. She liaised with parents and staff to create individualised educational programmes as appropriate. The behaviour support teacher worked well to support pupils but there was a lack of clarity about the strategies used and the targets set for pupils. Play activities at the early stages did not build well on the independent learning in the nursery.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Care, welfare and development	The quality of pastoral care was very good. Teaching and support staff worked well together to promote positive behaviour and create a warm and caring atmosphere. They were aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and healthy. Pupils knew what to do if they were upset and were confident that staff would help them. At all stages pupils showed a good awareness of how to maintain safe and healthy lifestyles. Staff in the nursery provided children with a healthy snack and supported them in brushing their teeth. There was a need to provide more healthy options in the school tuck shop. Effective arrangements were in place to transfer children from nursery to P1 and pupils from P7 to Mearns Academy.
Management and use of resources and space for learning	The headteacher and staff had created an orderly environment for learning. The school building was well maintained and there was suitable access for users with mobility difficulties. In addition to the two classrooms and the nursery playroom, there were three large rooms and a multi-purpose hall. Staff did not make best use of the three general purpose rooms. The playground area included a very attractive school garden and a secure nursery play area. Staff made good use of the school garden to develop pupils' awareness of environmental education.

Aspect	Comment
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality and fairness	<p>The overall climate of the school was welcoming and positive. Relationships between pupils and staff were very good. Children in the nursery were confident and well behaved. Pupils in the primary classes were friendly and helpful. Staff set appropriately high expectations of pupils' attendance and behaviour but needed to have higher expectations of pupils' attainment. They contributed effectively to developing learners' wider experiences. They treated pupils equally and fairly and all pupils were included in the life and work of the school. The school had not yet embedded its approaches to developing an understanding of racial equality and diversity through the curriculum. Weekly assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance and for celebrating and rewarding pupils' achievements.</p>
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	<p>Parents were successfully involved in the life of the school in a number of ways. They raised funds for the school and served on the Parent Council, helped with visits and supported events in school. There was scope to extend their involvement in their children's learning. The school consulted parents appropriately about sensitive health issues. Parents were kept well informed of events in school through regular newsletters. They found school reports and parents' evenings helpful and appreciated the opportunities they had to discuss their children's progress informally with staff. The school had productive links with local schools, the Active Schools Coordinator and the community worker.</p>

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Fettercairn School and Nursery Class provided a friendly, caring environment for learning. Learners were confident and outgoing. The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff worked hard and teamwork was effective. They were forging productive links with other professionals and local schools to support pupils' learning. Expectations of pupils' achievement were not high enough. Pupils' skills in reading and using ICT were not sufficiently well developed.

The headteacher was well respected by parents, pupils and staff. She was approachable and had played a key role in establishing a caring and supportive atmosphere within the school. She had successfully fostered a positive climate for improvement among staff and staff were very willing to support her in the provision of consistently high quality

learning and teaching activities. She needed to give clear leadership and direction to staff and involve them more systematically in monitoring the quality of pupils' experiences and attainment. Arrangements for self-evaluation were weak. The headteacher monitored teachers' plans, looked at samples of work, visited classes and gave written feedback to staff. She did not always provide sufficient guidance and challenge. Staff did not make effective use of the information gained from self-evaluation. With help from the education authority, particularly in developing capacity for strategic leadership, the school had the capacity to improve.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no requirements or recommendations.

Main points for action

The school and education authority, in liaison with HM Inspectors, should take action to ensure improvement in:

- pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics;
- the opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively and take increased responsibility for their own learning;
- arrangements for assessing and predicting learners' attainment in the nursery and primary classes, to ensure appropriate pace and challenge; and
- approaches to self-evaluation to bring about improvements in the quality of learners' experiences.

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. HM Inspectors will continue to engage with the school and the education authority in monitoring progress, and will undertake a follow-through inspection. This will result in a report to parents, within two years of the publication of this report, on the extent of improvement that has been achieved.

Isabel Bolton
HM Inspector

16 December 2008

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?	
The curriculum	satisfactory
Teaching for effective learning	satisfactory
Children's experiences (nursery class)	good
Learners' experiences (primary stages)	satisfactory
Improvements in performance (nursery class)	good
Improvements in performance (primary stages)	satisfactory

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting learning needs (nursery class)	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs (primary stages)	satisfactory

How good is the environment for learning?	
Care, welfare and development	very good
Management and use of resources and space for learning	good
The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
The school's success in involving parents, carers and families	good

Leading and improving the school	
Developing people and partnerships	good
Leadership of improvement and change (of the headteacher)	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

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
satisfactory	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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff made them welcome in the school and treated their children fairly. • Their children found schoolwork stimulating and challenging and were encouraged to work to the best of their ability. • Parents' evenings were helpful and informative. • The school was well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide them with a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improving pupils' education. • Explain how they could help their children with their homework.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school helped them to keep safe and healthy. • Teachers explained things clearly. • Pupils have a say in deciding how to make the school better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of some pupils was not good. • Teachers did not always tell them when they had done something well.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant issues. 	<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 and Recreation, 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, Greyfriars House, Gallowgate, Aberdeen AB10 1LQ or by telephoning 01224 642544. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spsa.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spsa.org.uk.

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