



**Auchnagatt School
Ellon
Aberdeenshire Council
17 March 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents² and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the 'ethos' of the school. By 'ethos' we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school's aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school's success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term 'school' is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. Examples of good practice
4. How well do children learn and achieve?
5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?
6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?
7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?
8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
9. What happens next?

1. The school

Auchnagatt School is a non-denominational school. It serves the village of Auchnagatt and the surrounding area. The roll was 51 when the inspection was carried out in January 2009. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average in 2006/2007.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Highly motivated children who enjoy learning.
- Children's growing independence as learners and their skill in working with others.
- Positive relationships between children, staff and parents.
- The school's success in promoting health and wellbeing across the school community.
- The very effective leadership of the headteacher in improving school practice.

3. Examples of good practice

- *Learning to Learn* weeks.
- The dining room experience.
- Improvement through self-evaluation.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Across the school, children are developing very good skills in working in groups and evaluating their own work and that of others. They enjoy learning and are becoming confident, independent learners.

Children can discuss their own learning and, at the upper stages, understand how they learn best. In the last few years, the school has significantly improved attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Children continue to progress well. Almost all read with understanding and are developing good writing skills. Most talk well and express their ideas clearly. They would now benefit from better organised opportunities for longer group discussions. Across the school, children are confident in working with numbers and know how to solve problems. Children use information and communications technology (ICT) effectively in their work. For example, children in P1/P2 made a video recording and took photographs to enrich their learning in writing. Those in P6/P7 researched topics of interest and shared their findings using PowerPoint presentations. Children experience success in a wide range of activities and are developing very good personal and social skills. Those in P6/P7 are developing their citizenship skills by organising a community café for the village. They act as playground buddies and use their training as mediators to sort out minor playground issues. Across the school, children know about the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise. All children and staff, including the catering staff, contribute to the very pleasant atmosphere in the dining hall. This contributed to the school's national recognition as a finalist for the Scottish Education Awards on Health and Wellbeing.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff provide a varied, stimulating curriculum which is relevant to children's interests. Teachers are making good use of guidance from *Curriculum for Excellence* to help them make learning both relevant and enjoyable. Topic work provides children with challenging activities and enables them to make links between areas of learning. Teachers plan activities which allow children to be active and independent in their learning. They are making a good start to giving children choices about how to complete tasks, taking account of how they like to learn. Teachers use ICT well to enrich children's learning. For example, children in P3 to P5 viewed a famous poet recite a poem. This helped them improve their own recitations in preparation for a Scottish verse

speaking event. Visiting teachers help children develop their skills in science, drama, art and music. Children make good use of the local area to broaden children's understanding and make learning more meaningful, for example by visiting a farm or helping design a play park. The homework policy has recently improved, resulting in a greater variety of tasks and more choice for children. Children evaluate their homework together, deciding who will be the "Homework Hero" or "X-factor" winner each week. They now find homework more enjoyable and relevant to their classwork.

Staff know children very well and support them sensitively. They identify their strengths and learning needs very effectively. Teachers provide a well-judged balance of challenge and support in almost all lessons. Children are making suitable progress from their prior learning. Staff use a wide variety of interesting resources and activities to motivate children to learn. Many children commented that learning was fun. They are confident and enthusiastic about tackling the activities provided for them. All staff, including visiting support teachers and the headteacher, work together to provide high quality support for children who need additional help. They involve parents and children in creating individualised educational programmes with appropriate learning targets. Children's progress towards meeting targets is carefully monitored. Support staff give valuable help to teachers and children.

5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

Relationships between home and school are very positive. Parents appreciate the information they receive about events in school and their children's learning. Children help to produce class newsletters detailing the key areas of learning for each term. Staff and children organise well-received curriculum evenings when children demonstrate new approaches to learning. Parents find the reports on their children's progress helpful. They feel welcome in school and find staff very approachable and helpful. The Parent Council offers strong

support to the school. A number of parents help improve children's learning by helping with various activities in school. The school has effective partnerships with other agencies to support children and their families as needed. There are clear, effective approaches for dealing with complaints. Children are well supported as they transfer from pre-school to P1 and from P7 to Ellon Academy or Mintlaw Academy.

6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

The school has very effective ways of gathering the views of parents, children and staff on the work of the school. The headteacher uses this information effectively to improve learning and achievement. Children can bring about improvements through their involvement in the pupil council and the eco and health committees. At all stages, they take responsibility for various routine tasks. Children in P4 to P7 use their literacy skills well to help younger children read and write by taking part in paired reading and writing activities. Children and staff regularly reflect on their work and review their planned targets. As a result, children's experiences have improved. Staff and children have a real sense of involvement in school improvement. Staff teamwork is strong. All staff help improve the school by deciding what needs to improve and working together to bring about change. They are committed to their own professional development and are keen to introduce new approaches to learning with a view to improving children's experiences. They regularly share good practice and willingly take on responsibilities for aspects of the work of the school.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

Staff and children are proud of their school. There is a positive and purposeful atmosphere with a focus on everyone contributing in some way to the school community. The headteacher and staff set high expectations for children's behaviour and achievement. They actively encourage children to take advantage of the variety of opportunities

available to help them to achieve success. Successes are celebrated through assemblies and class awards and are shared with the local community. Staff are very committed to ensuring children's safety and wellbeing. They treat children fairly and with respect. This is reflected in the behaviour and attitudes of the children in their dealings with others. Children feel safe at school and feel that their views are taken into account by staff. This is particularly evident when staff identify targets to improve their teaching, share them with children and ask children to evaluate how well they are doing.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

Children, parents and staff have developed shared values and a clear vision for the school. The headteacher gives strong leadership and direction to the school. She has successfully led the school through a period of change and continues to foster innovative approaches to learning and teaching. Throughout she has maintained a clear focus on improving learning and attainment. Staff are committed to making learning fun and challenging, and are enthusiastic about taking forward the developments of *Curriculum for Excellence*. With very good self-evaluation steering the creative approaches of the headteacher and staff, the school is very well placed to continue to improve.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits following this inspection. The education authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to develop children's independent learning skills, building on existing good practice.
- Continue to review and develop the curriculum in line with the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Auchnagatt School.

Improvements in performance	very good
Learners' experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	very good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

HM Inspector: Isabel Bolton
17 March 2009

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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

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