

**Sorn Primary School  
East Ayrshire Council  
27 January 2004**

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## **1. Background**

Sorn Primary School was inspected in September 2003 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 and the environment for learning. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed staff and pupils. They assessed the school's processes for self-evaluation. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents and staff, and to pupils from P4 to P7. Information about responses to the questionnaires appears in

Appendix 2. Members of the inspection team also met with the chairperson of the School Board and a group of parents.

The school serves the village of Sorn and surrounding areas. At the time of the inspection the roll was 76. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was significantly below the national average. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

## **2. Key strengths**

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- The strong sense of improvement in the school, much of which was due to the headteacher's high quality leadership.
- The very good and purposeful staff teamwork.
- High levels of attainment in both English language and mathematics.
- Very good levels of support for pupils.
- Careful and positive attention afforded to the pastoral care of pupils.
- Very effective partnerships between the school, parents and the local community.

## **3. Views of parents and carers, pupils and staff**

Parents and carers were very happy with almost all aspects of the work of the school. This included the school's positive reputation in the local community and the fact that teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment. Pupils felt safe in the school and believed that teachers set high expectations for them. A small number of pupils thought that they did not get the right amount of homework. Staff were very positive about the school. All liked working in the school and thought that the school was well led.

## **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The headteacher and staff worked together to provide a broad and improving curriculum for all pupils. Staff were supported by clear and helpful programmes of study in most curriculum areas. Recent planned improvements to health education had produced a very effective programme. Pupils had very good opportunities to develop appropriate skills in personal and social development, including learning how to participate effectively in the pupil council. Pupils also had access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Commendably, all pupils from P4 to P7 were learning French. Pupils, however, had too few regular opportunities to use information and communications technology (ICT) in their learning activities.

The quality of teaching was consistently good and sometimes very good. Lessons were well prepared and effectively organised to meet the needs of, for example, multi-stage classes. Teachers built effectively on pupils' previous learning. This was especially evident in mathematics where teachers skilfully encouraged pupils to explain how they arrived at their answers. Carefully organised planning resulted in some highly effective examples of well delivered team teaching, involving a range of staff. At times, however, teachers spent too long introducing topics, which resulted in a slow pace of learning. Teachers did not always share the aims of lessons with pupils. Almost all pupils were highly motivated and interested in their learning. They concentrated well at all times. Overall, however, pupils had too few opportunities to work independently or collaboratively on, for example, investigations or research tasks.

Pupils at P1/2 enjoyed early musical activities and had made a good start to learning to identify and maintain a rhythm. Pupils at P3/4 listened very well in health education and understood some rules of safety in the countryside. In social subjects, pupils at P6/7 were developing a range of English language skills including very good note taking and discussion skills. Pupils were given a breadth of purposeful learning experiences including visits to the theatre, residential trips and opportunities to play musical instruments. Across the stages and in a variety of situations, pupils showed genuine respect and tolerance towards one another. The school's buddy system encouraged older pupils to take on responsibility for younger pupils and assist them in settling into school life. The pupil council gave pupils significant opportunities to discuss and influence important school issues.

### **English language**

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in English language was very good. The school had made very good progress in raising standards of attainment in reading and writing. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Some pupils had achieved these levels early. At all stages, pupils listened very well to adults and to one another in a variety of situations. Pupils at P1/2 listened well and talked confidently about their experiences. At P4/5, pupils listened attentively to one another's contributions and responded confidently to the teacher's questions. All pupils at P1/2 had made a very good start to early reading activities and were developing a good knowledge of sounds. Pupils at P4/5 were able to discuss how a poet achieves effects while at P7, pupils were able to explore an author's use of setting and character-development. Pupils were learning to write for an increasing variety of purposes and were making good progress in planning and structuring their writing. Overall, standards of handwriting and presentation were inconsistent.

### **Mathematics**

In mathematics, the overall quality of pupils' attainment was very good. The school had made very good progress in raising standards of attainment in all aspects of mathematics. Across the stages, almost all pupils had attained appropriate national levels in information handling, in number, money and measurement and in shape, position and movement. Some pupils had achieved these levels earlier than the national norm. At the early stages, pupils were making very good progress in developing number facts. At P4, most pupils had a sound grasp of place value in number, while at P7 almost all were able to add well mentally in the context of the 24-hour clock. Across the stages, almost all pupils had made good progress in their understanding of aspects of both information handling and shape, position and movement. At P2, for example, pupils had a very good knowledge of many of the properties of three-dimensional shapes. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and enquiry

were developing well. Staff needed to ensure that these skills were consolidated systematically across the school.

## **5. How well are pupils supported?**

The whole staff, in close co-operation with parents, worked well together to ensure very good levels of support for all pupils. The headteacher and other staff knew pupils well and were sensitive to their needs. The headteacher ensured that the clear, helpful approaches to addressing child protection issues were shared effectively with all staff. Anti-bullying principles and procedures were effective and known to pupils. Arrangements to ensure the safety of pupils in school were well organised and carefully managed. Older pupils offered positive support and encouragement for younger ones. Pupils felt safe and well looked after in a caring and inclusive atmosphere.

The headteacher made effective use of staffing levels to provide additional support for pupils. The visiting learning support teacher gave very well planned and focused additional help to a range of pupils in both English language and mathematics. She met regularly with classroom teachers and provided advice and resources across a range of areas. Staff had put in place helpful individualised educational programmes for pupils who required additional help in their learning. Teachers regularly reviewed pupils' learning targets and their progress towards achieving them. The school had well established and productive links with parents and a range of relevant agencies. The visiting teacher for the hearing impaired provided very good specialist support. Classroom assistants and special educational needs auxiliaries provided high quality care and attention for pupils. The school and education authority had effective procedures in place for maintaining and reviewing Records of Needs.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation was good, overall. Staff worked hard to create a bright, stimulating environment in the traditional accommodation. Most of the classrooms were spacious and well organised for learning. Staff made very effective use of the nearby village hall for a variety of activities. A large area of the school's playground surface had been improved recently. There was a need, however, for further improvements to the school building. Some external paintwork and much of the internal decoration required attention. Privacy in the pupils' toilets needed to be improved. Storage space was very limited.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>The school's atmosphere was warm, friendly and welcoming. Relationships between staff and pupils were very positive. Pupils were proud of the school and all of them wore school uniform. They had clear opportunities to influence the work of the school. Their behaviour was of a consistently high standard. They were courteous and displayed care in the way they treated one another. The quality of teamwork amongst staff was very good. Staff responded positively to the headteacher's inclusive approach to staff development. Staff morale was high. The school employed a range of effective methods to recognise and promote pupil achievement, including the school's own award scheme. In class work, however, teachers did not have consistently high expectations of pupils' learning and attainment. Regular assemblies provided good opportunities for religious observance. The headteacher and staff actively promoted equality and fairness throughout the work of the school.</p>
Partnership with parents and the community	<p>The headteacher and staff worked in a close and highly effective partnership with parents and the local community. The School Board, parents' association and the Sorn Educational Trust all worked in co-operation with the headteacher and staff to support and enhance the life of the school community. Parents had been actively involved in an initiative aimed at promoting healthy eating, and had helped secure improvements to the school playground. They were consulted on a range of important issues. Communication between school and home was a highly effective two-way process. Regular, informative newsletters, helpful progress reports and effective homework diaries all contributed to open and helpful communications and partnerships. Senior pupils were actively involved in the development of the school's new website. The school had well-developed links with both the local nursery school, and its associated secondary.</p>

## 7. Improving the school

Sorn Primary School provided a very good standard of education for its pupils. The school held a positive and important place in the local community. The headteacher and staff worked in a highly effective partnership with parents and the broader community. The school's curriculum was good and improving. The quality of teaching was consistently good and sometimes very good. Pupils were very happy in this caring and inclusive environment. Standards of attainment in English language and mathematics were very good. Pupils were developing a wide range of appropriate personal and social skills. Their learning experiences were generally effective but needed to include more opportunities for them to work together. The range and quality of support for pupils was of a very high standard.

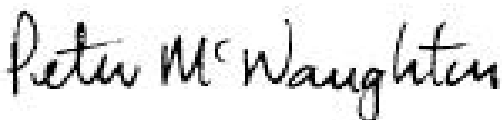
The school was very well placed to build on the already high standards of work. The headteacher had been in post for 18 months. In that relatively short period of time, she had provided highly effective leadership for learning. In consultation with staff, she had set out a clear vision of the high quality learning experiences she wanted for pupils. She worked skilfully and in close partnership with staff, pupils and parents to ensure significant improvements in many areas of school life. Staff were actively involved in working together to take forward school initiatives. The headteacher had introduced new and increasingly effective monitoring and self-evaluation procedures, including a helpful approach to tracking pupils' progress and attainment. There was clear evidence of the positive impact of previous improvement plans.

The school should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, it should take account of the need to:

- develop more active learning opportunities for pupils, including regular use of computers;
- ensure that learning activities offer appropriate pace and challenge for pupils; and
- improve aspects of the school's accommodation.

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



Peter McNaughton  
HM Inspector

27 January 2004

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

### **We judged the following to be very good**

- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Equality and fairness
- Partnerships with parents, the School Board and the community
- Leadership

### **We judged the following to be good**

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Accommodation and facilities
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- 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.

<p><b>What pleased parents and carers most</b></p>	<p><b>What parents and carers would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers set high standards for pupils' attainment.</li> <li>• Staff showed concern and care for the welfare of children.</li> <li>• Staff made them feel welcome in the school.</li> <li>• The school was well led.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minority of parents felt that aspects of accommodation needed to be improved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased pupils most</b></p>	<p><b>What pupils would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could.</li> <li>• Teachers explained things clearly and helped them when they were stuck.</li> <li>• Pupils had a say in deciding how to make the school better.</li> <li>• They got on well with other pupils.</li> <li>• The school helped them to keep safe and healthy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework that they received.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What pleased staff most</b></p>	<p><b>What staff would like to see improved</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They liked working in the school.</li> <li>• They worked hard to promote and maintain good relations with the local community.</li> <li>• Pupils were enthusiastic about learning.</li> <li>• The school was well led.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no aspects staff would like to see improved.</li> </ul>

## **How can you contact us?**

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Director of Educational and Social Services, 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, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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 Frank Crawford, HMCI at the above address. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from that office and on our website.

If you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman directly or through your member of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government Departments and Agencies. She will not normally consider your complaint before the HMIE complaints procedure has been used. Instead, she will usually ask you to give us the chance to put matters right if we can.

Complaints to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman must be submitted within 12 months of the date of publication of this report.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

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