

**Priorsford Primary School
Peebles
Scottish Borders Council
5 December 2006**

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1. Background

Priorsford Primary School was inspected in September 2006 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, 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 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 an area of the town of Peebles to the south of the River Tweed, including the new Whitehaugh Estate, the modern village of Cardona and the rural areas of Manor and Kirkton Manor. At the time of the inspection the roll was 453, including 60 children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was well below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The school roll had risen significantly in recent years and as a consequence several aspects of accommodation were no longer adequate to meet needs. The Council had recognised this and, in consultation with the school and School Board, had planned a phased enlargement of facilities with a phase one extension to commence within the current session.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

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

2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Courteous, friendly and very well-behaved pupils who took pride in their school.
- Attainment in reading.
- Pupils' skills in drama and physical education and notable wider achievements in Eco School activities and sports.
- The commitment of all staff to the care and well-being of pupils and their warm relationships with them.
- Interested parents, including an active School Board and hard-working parent-teacher association (PTA).
- Pupils' knowledge of healthy eating and their active sense of ownership of the school's healthy eating tuck shop.

3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to a sample of parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Whilst parents recognised that their children were generally happy at school and making steady progress in their learning, many raised a number of concerns about key aspects of the school's work. They felt that the school's communications with them were inadequate and often 'last minute'. They wanted the content of homework improved and much more information about the school's priorities for improvement, the curriculum and how to support their children's learning. They felt that the challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils put at risk the learning environment of others and wanted to be better assured of pupils' safety at breaks. Most thought that the school had insufficient accommodation to cater for a rapidly increasing roll. Many thought that the leadership of the school was in need of improvement and that any concerns raised with the school were not dealt with well. They also thought that there was a lack of educational challenge for pupils and they expressed a concern that the reputation of the school in its community was not as good as it should be. Pupils said they enjoyed school. They thought teachers explained things clearly, expected them to work hard and told them when they had done something well. A significant minority felt that the behaviour of some pupils was not good. Teachers and support staff thought that promoted staff did not operate effectively as a team, pupil indiscipline was not dealt with effectively, and around a third felt the school's leadership was in need of improvement. A quarter thought that communications within the school were ineffective but said that some recent steps had been taken to try to address this.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The curriculum was suitably broad. A significant proportion of time was given to improving attainment in English language but the impact of this on pupils' learning required to be monitored more effectively. Good attention was given to developing pupils' skills through science. However, the systematic development of skills through social studies was less evident. The visiting specialist teachers in the expressive arts provided high quality learning experiences for pupils. However, there was little time for specialists to plan follow-up work with class teachers to ensure continuity in pupils' learning. Whilst there were steps taken to develop pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT), software and hardware restrictions limited pupils' opportunities to practise skills and to use ICT regularly to support their learning across the curriculum. Personal and social education permeated the curriculum well. The overall quality of teaching was good and in several instances very good. Teachers shared with pupils the learning intentions of lessons but were less thorough at the end of lessons in reviewing what had been learned. They planned lessons carefully and used praise to good effect. On occasions, the questioning of pupils needed to be more demanding. Teachers regularly corrected pupils' written work but feedback to them required to provide more focused advice on how to improve their skills. Insufficient time was given to active learning involving significant challenge. The promising start made in a few classes to developing pupils' critical thinking and partner or small-group work skills needed to be shared and developed more widely across the school. Teachers' knowledge of available resources to support learning and teaching and dated ICT resources required attention. Homework was sporadic and lacked variety and challenge.

Pupils were hard working and ready to learn. However, they required to experience brisker lessons where the pace of learning would provide a sufficient degree of challenge and ensure appropriate progress. At the early stages, some good steps were being taken to encourage pupils to learn through play. Greater attention needed to be given to ensuring that learning at the early stages consistently built upon pupils' pre-school experiences. At P4 to P7, pupils' mapping skills were weak. Pupils proved that they could be confident, responsive, responsible and highly motivated learners when they participated in drama and physical education activities. They now needed such experiences much more consistently across the curriculum and more regular opportunities to become effective collaborative and independent learners.

The staff took some good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements but had yet to systematically monitor and record these. Across the stages, pupils were learning important citizenship skills, to accept responsibilities well and to take decisions. Several at P4 to P7 represented and took account of the views of others in Pupil Council discussions. The Pupil Council had yet to discuss school meals or food available in the school. Staff had yet to determine how the views of those at P1 to P3 would also impact on decisions taken. Through a strong emphasis on healthy lifestyles pupils were knowledgeable about diet and exercise. Many had gained a good understanding of the advantages of conservation and recycling through Eco School activities. The school was working towards silver Eco School status. Pupils at the

upper stages organised a healthy eating tuck shop. They had learned much about healthy eating habits and stock control. At several stages pupils learned important enterprise skills. Those in P7 had gained much from creating a school newspaper in the previous summer term. Through participation in a range of out-of-school activities pupils had developed a range of sporting and cultural skills, including cross-country running, cricket, football, netball, rugby, choir and drama. Individuals and teams had achieved some notable successes, for example becoming Scottish Primary School Cross-Country champions. Through links with the local Eastgate Theatre some pupils were learning a range of skills relevant to putting on a drama production.

English language

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. Standards had steadily improved in recent years but with a slight dip last year in writing. Most pupils were achieving appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. A significant number of pupils at the upper stages exceeded expected levels in reading. At the early stages, many pupils were making very good progress but this early gain was not sustained in some aspects as pupils moved into the middle stages. Learning activities did not consistently provide sufficient challenge for pupils who were largely capable of achieving greater literacy skills. Pupils with additional support needs and those for whom English was not their first language were making good progress in their learning. There was no whole-school approach to assessing listening and talking. At all stages, most pupils spoke with confidence and listened attentively. A significant number had difficulty in structuring and sustaining personal talk and in building on the views expressed by others in group discussion. Most pupils read fluently and with good understanding. The majority read widely for pleasure and could talk enthusiastically about books they had read, readily recounting key features of plot and characters. Most pupils could write at length and for a variety of purposes. However, outwith the early stages, pupils were not consistently given sufficient information about how to improve their writing. Spelling, punctuation and presentation of written work was not of a consistently good standard.

Mathematics

The overall quality of pupils' attainment in mathematics was adequate. In recent years there had been a trend of steady improvement. Most pupils achieved the appropriate national level by P7. However, the momentum of the promising early gains in achievement in P2 were not being built upon consistently. Pupils in P4 and P7 showed strengths in information handling and displayed competency in producing and interpreting graphs in a range of forms. Those in P4 were confident with fractions and simple addition and subtraction orally. In P7, pupils were confident in written number calculations involving money and measurement. A significant number of pupils in P4 and P7 were less confident in their mental calculations. Those in P7 had an insecure knowledge of shape, position and movement. At all stages, pupils' development of skills in mathematical problem solving was weak. Opportunities to develop mathematical skills through the use of ICT were limited. However, pupils in P5 were experiencing very good opportunities to develop and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills through lessons in technology.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Arrangements made to support pupils' learning were adequate. Too little attention was given to matching tasks to the needs of individual pupils in classes. As a consequence, many pupils lacked sufficient rigour and challenge in their learning whilst others struggled to cope with class activities. Pupils' needs were not well served by silent and passive classroom activities where creativity, experimentation and active learning were uncommon. Many pupils were not clear about the levels they were presently working towards or exactly what they had to do to improve their work and achieve the next level. The support for learning teachers were skilled in supporting individual pupils and small groups, mainly in English language. However, they did not operate alongside class teachers often enough to impact on the learning of a wider range of pupils, and across the curriculum. In addition, they had insufficient opportunities to liaise with class teachers to plan and review pupils' progress. Initiatives to support the highest and lowest 20% of achievers were promising but needed to ensure that meeting the needs of all pupils was not compromised. Individualised educational programmes with appropriate short- and long-term learning targets had been devised and shared with parents where pupils' had significant additional support needs. Procedures for reviewing the progress of pupils with a Record of Needs or of those who were looked after and had Care Plans were good. Hard working and very committed support staff provided a very good level of assistance to pupils, several of whom had specific behavioural, sensory or physical additional support needs. On occasions, there needed to be better planning and management of individual pupils' programmes to support pupils more effectively both in and out of classes. This will require more effective joint planning and communications between support staff and class teachers. A good range of Council and health personnel provided appropriate support to pupils and guidance to staff.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>Staff were committed to ensuring pupils' care and welfare and the school had clear and effective arrangements in place. Staff were well informed about issues relating to child protection and promoted pupils' personal safety through the curriculum. Procedures for addressing any incidents of bullying were effective. The few classroom incidents of poor behaviour which did occur gave rise to considerable staff and pupil concern about overall pupil behaviour. Staff needed to accept that there might be times when pupils' behaviour fell below their very high expectations. They also needed to deal more effectively with pupils' perceptions that pupil behaviour could be much improved. Staff actively promoted appropriate diet and a healthy lifestyle among pupils, complemented by wholesome meals produced by dining staff. Transition arrangements for pupils entering P1 from nursery and for P7 pupils transferring to Peebles High School were appropriate.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>Most teachers displayed pupils' work to good effect to create an interesting learning environment. Most teaching areas were of an appropriate size but the increased pupil roll had placed very significant pressures on general purpose spaces, particularly on the multi-purpose hall. Office and staffroom accommodation was cramped and storage space was limited. There were no spaces for staff to meet readily with parents. A grass sports field and teachers' resource area were strengths. The building was accessible to those with mobility difficulties. Building security and aspects of playground safety arrangements required to be reviewed and infant toilets needed to be upgraded. A number of other significant health and safety matters were drawn to the attention of the headteacher.</p>

Aspect	Comment
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Staff ensured visitors were made welcome. Pupils were proud of their school and wore school uniform. Relationships between staff and pupils were warm and positive. However, there were some tensions between staff and the senior management team. Pupils' behaviour was very good. Pupils were friendly and they responded well overall to the inter-house points competition which rewarded good work and conduct. Teachers' expectations of pupils' achievements and pupils' expectations of their own performance were not consistently high enough. Weekly assemblies provided opportunities for celebrating pupils' successes. The school chaplain visited classes regularly but there was scope to increase opportunities for religious observance at assemblies. The school made good efforts to be inclusive through integrating pupils with additional support needs into the life and work of classes. There was scope to improve the effectiveness of this integration. A policy for racial equality was in place but staff had yet to be trained in how this should impact on their work.</p>

<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>Links with parents and the local community required to be improved. Parents were keen to be involved in the life of the school and several assisted with classroom activities. Parents were given opportunities to learn about aspects of sex education and personal relationships which their children were to study. However, communications between home and school had important weaknesses. Parents needed better quality information about their children’s learning and sufficient notice of wider school events. Through meetings with teachers and written reports parents were informed of pupils’ progress. However, reporting on pupils’ skills acquisition and their next steps in learning had yet to feature consistently. The recent introduction of personal learning planning had potential to address some of the parental concerns. However, more effective channels of home-school dialogue needed to be established to regularly share and address concerns. Steps were being taken to track more effectively how parental complaints were dealt with. The School Board and PTA worked in close partnership and gave the school very good support. The school had a long tradition of working closely with its community, for example through pupils participating in the annual Beltane festival. However, the school needed to be more proactive in seeking to ensure this ongoing community interest and support for its work.</p>
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7. Leading and improving the school

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

Staff at Priorsford Primary School provided pupils with a good standard of care. Relationships between staff and pupils were warm and purposeful. Almost all pupils had a positive attitude to learning and were very well behaved. Teaching was good overall, but approaches needed to be more varied to motivate pupils and help them become more effective independent learners. A lack of consistency in the pace and challenge of lessons meant that the full potential of too many pupils was not being realised. Staff expectations of pupils’ achievements and pupils’ expectations of their own performance needed to be higher. Pupils needed to know what they needed to do to improve their work. Learning support teachers and a range of support staff provided pupils with additional support needs with a good measure of assistance. Teachers supported each other well but greater attention should be given to sharing existing good practice more widely. The school had very considerable potential to improve pupils’ learning experiences. However, it will require the ongoing support of the education authority to develop its capacity to improve.

In her two-and-a-half years since appointment, the headteacher had been successful in introducing aspects of change related to policy development and resources. However, her leadership and management of the school had important weaknesses. She had yet to establish productive working relationships with staff and parents. Communications within the school and with parents and the wider community needed to be improved. The headteacher, with the support of the education authority, had taken some recent steps to improve matters but these developments had yet to impact fully on practice and ensure she won the trust and support of others. The promoted staff team provided the headteacher with loyal support. The depute headteachers made a particularly important contribution to aspects of the work of the school. However, due to staffing circumstances, roles and remits of promoted staff had changed frequently and their potential collective impact on classroom practice was not realised. Further additional promoted posts, to complete the management team, were to be advertised shortly. In order to ensure all operated effectively a comprehensive review of roles and remits was urgently required. Class teachers made good contributions to curriculum and policy development through their membership of working parties. However, they needed to feel that their work was valued. The school's approaches to monitoring and evaluating its work were not sufficiently rigorous. All promoted staff needed to work alongside teachers more regularly to support learning and teaching and to provide more robust evidence of how well the school was meeting the needs of all pupils. The tracking of pupils' progress needed to be significantly improved to provide pupils and parents with feedback on pupils' progress. The senior management team should now focus on improving staff teamwork, communications, pupils' attainment, self-evaluation and the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

Main points for action

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

- implementing the recently devised strategies to improve communications within the school, with parents and with the wider community in order to better support pupils' learning;
- the overall leadership of the school, including a review of the remits and deployment of promoted staff and to ensure they work effectively and efficiently together and with all other staff to enable pupils to reach their full potential;
- meeting pupils' needs more effectively, particularly at the middle and upper stages, by improving the pace of lessons, challenging pupils more consistently and encouraging pupils to become more independent learners;
- using information and communications technology (ICT) much more effectively to support learning and teaching and to develop pupils' ICT skills;
- reviewing learning and teaching approaches to develop collaborative and interactive approaches; and
- self-evaluation, including the monitoring and tracking of pupils' achievement, in order to identify and address more effectively pupils' next steps in learning.

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.

Alistair F Marquis
HM Assistant Chief Inspector

5 December 2006

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	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	adequate

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

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	good
Accommodation and facilities	adequate
Climate and relationships	good
Expectations and promoting achievement	adequate
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	weak

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	weak
Leadership across the school	adequate
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
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.

What parents thought the school did well	What parents think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children enjoyed school and were treated fairly by staff. • Staff showed concern for their children's care and welfare. • They were made to feel welcome in the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set higher standards for pupils' attainment. • Explain how they can support their children's homework. • Consult and inform them more effectively about their children's education and the school's priorities for improvement. • Deal more effectively with incidents of poor behaviour. • Improve the leadership of the school.
What pupils thought the school did well	What pupils think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They liked being at the school. • Their teachers knew them well as individuals. • The school helped to keep them safe and healthy. • Teachers expected them to work hard and helped them when they had difficulties with class work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of some pupils could be improved.
What staff thought the school did well	What staff think the school could do better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They set high standards for pupils' work and pupils' care and welfare received good attention. • There was good mutual respect between teachers and pupils. • Good relations were fostered with the local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with incidents of indiscipline more effectively. • Improve the leadership of the school and senior management teamwork. • Improve staff communications. • Support staff wanted training time used more effectively.

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 Lifelong Learning, 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, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA or by telephoning 01506 600384. Copies are also available on our website www.hmie.gov.uk.

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Should you wish to comment on any aspect of primary inspections, you should write in the first instance to Chris McIlroy, Acting HMCI, at the above address.

Our complaints procedure

If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to Hazel Dewart, Business Management Unit, HM Inspectorate of Education, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office or by telephoning 01506 600258 or from our website at www.hmie.gov.uk.

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. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

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