

**Pentland Primary School
and Nursery Class
City of Edinburgh Council
19 February 2008**

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1. Background

Pentland Primary School and Nursery Class were inspected in November 2007 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 parents.

The school serves part of the south-west area of Edinburgh. It was formed in 2005 following the merger of two other schools in the area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 399, including 72 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.

- The overall quality of children's learning experiences in the nursery class.
- Well-considered and effective provision for pupils with additional support needs.
- Highly successful partnerships with parents and the wider community.
- High quality accommodation which was having a positive impact on learning.
- Success in building a new school community in the period since the merger.
- The vision and purposeful leadership of the headteacher.

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.

All parents in the nursery class who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that their children enjoyed being at nursery, found activities stimulating and felt welcome in the nursery. Parents of pupils in the primary classes were positive about almost all aspects of the school. They thought that pupils enjoyed being in school, were treated fairly and that there was mutual respect between teachers and pupils. They believed the school had a good reputation. Pupils thought teachers knew them well, told them when they did something right and checked their homework. Staff liked working in the school and thought it was well led. Some raised concerns over approaches to dealing with indiscipline and support staff wanted more opportunities to contribute to school decisions.

4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?

Pupils' learning experiences and achievements

The quality of the curriculum from P1 to P7 was good. In the nursery class, staff planned a broad range of stimulating and challenging experiences for children and provided them with a very good curriculum. Staff followed children's interests well and involved them in planning their own learning. In the primary school, teachers had updated most policies and guidelines to provide helpful advice. Teachers mostly gave additional attention to English language and mathematics but the use of this additional time was not yet consistently monitored across the school. Pupils had a range of enterprise education experiences and were actively involved in health promotion. They did not yet benefit from two hours of high quality physical education per week, in line with national recommendations. Across the school, pupils were making increased use of information and communications technology (ICT). The quality of teaching was good overall. In the nursery, staff interacted very effectively with children to support and extend their learning and encourage them to think and develop ideas. Most teachers from P1 to P7 gave clear explanations and made effective use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. They were benefiting from school initiatives to promote active learning and critical thinking among pupils. Teachers had started to share with pupils what they were expected to learn and how success would be measured. However, more required to be done to extend such good practice across all classes and lessons.

The overall quality of pupils' learning experiences in the primary classes was adequate. Children in the nursery were developing appropriate skills using the computer and interactive whiteboard. They were learning to use a digital camera. Children had good opportunities to be independently creative and inventive through a range of art and craft activities. Many enjoyed imaginative play in the fire station and enthusiastically acted out a variety of roles. They benefited from daily access to energetic activities outdoors, and were developing coordination skills and awareness of space. At P1 and P2, pupils had some opportunities to learn through play but more required to be done to build on their earlier pre-school experiences. Overall, pupils responded well to those tasks and activities which allowed them to work collaboratively and take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. They would benefit from more such opportunities in all areas of the curriculum. In some lessons a few pupils lost concentration and the pace of learning was too slow, especially for higher-attaining pupils.

The school took a number of useful steps to promote wider achievements. Children in the nursery were settled and aware of playroom routines. They were developing good skills in sharing toys, cooperating during play and taking turns. They chose activities well and most were motivated and enthusiastic. They were developing independence in personal tasks and helped tidy the playroom and prepare snacks. Across the primary stages, pupils took part enthusiastically in sporting activities such as netball and football. Pupils had useful opportunities to develop positive attitudes towards the environment through participation in ecological projects and the gardening club. They had taken steps to promote recycling and composting and were examining the school's use of energy. The pupil council had helped raise pupils' awareness of their responsibilities for others. Older pupils supported younger ones through, for example, acting as playground helpers and junior road safety officers.

English language

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in all aspects of communication and language. Staff promoted early literacy through a wide variety of play situations. Children were beginning to experiment with making marks and letters. They could recognise their name in print and some were developing an awareness of letter sounds. Most children listened very attentively and contributed confidently to discussions. At the primary stages, the quality of attainment was good. In recent years attainment in reading and writing had improved significantly. Most pupils now achieved the appropriate national levels in reading and in writing. A large proportion at P2 and P5 achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. The school was now working to ensure that such early gains were maintained. Those pupils not achieving appropriate levels were very well supported and were making good progress. The school was not able to provide reliable information on the levels of attainment achieved by pupils in listening and talking, but, on the evidence available, pupils were making good progress. Pupils listened well to teachers. They were able to speak confidently about aspects of their lives, interests and books they had read. Most were able to contribute purposefully to discussions in group situations. At P2 and P3, many pupils read confidently and enjoyed sharing books with teachers and other adults. By P7, pupils could read appropriate texts with understanding and were able to discuss books they had read, give a personal opinion and consider the authors' use of language. Pupils across the school wrote for a variety of purposes and by P7 there were many examples of extended pieces of high quality. The quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of written work varied but was good overall.

Mathematics

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. Children in the nursery were making good progress in early mathematics. They were developing a very good understanding of early number and showed a keen interest in counting. However, there was scope to further develop mathematical understanding in play situations. Almost all pupils at P3, the majority at P4, most at P6 and just over half of pupils by the end of P7, were attaining appropriate national levels. Almost all pupils at P3 had attained these standards earlier than might normally have been expected, whereas only a few at P7 attained such national levels early. Attainment had improved significantly over the past two years. Pupils with additional support needs were making good progress. Pupils achieved well when they were engaged in more practical mathematical

activities. Pupils were confident when using ICT to create a variety of graphs and skilled when, for example, interpreting bar graphs and pie charts. Across the school, most pupils showed a good understanding of number. They could perform simple transactions involving money, including giving change. At the upper stages they could complete mental calculations confidently, but were less accurate when performing written calculations. They had a very good knowledge of shape and angles. While pupils could solve problems, they did not have sufficient understanding of the range of strategies that could be used.

5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?

Overall, pupils' learning needs were very well met. In the nursery, staff provided a wide range of activities and tasks which were very well matched to children's interests and needs. They made effective use of assessment information to ensure children made appropriate progress with their learning. In the primary classes, pupils were mostly matched to appropriate tasks and activities. Across the school, staff and senior managers worked effectively together to monitor all pupils' progress and identify those who required additional support with their learning or behaviour, including higher attaining pupils. Teachers involved pupils and parents well in developing and implementing individualised educational programmes and well-considered passports for pupils which helped ensure that their learning needs were well met. Pupils were making good progress towards meeting the short- and long-term learning targets. Staff monitored pupils closely to ensure that they were making good progress. The work of learning assistants was very well planned and supported pupils effectively. Learning assistants had been trained in a therapeutic programme to support a few pupils with balance and coordination difficulties. A very wide range of partner agencies contributed productively to meeting pupils' needs. Commendably, staff had made appropriate arrangements to represent pupils who experienced difficulty with communicating their views. Children in the nursery and pupils throughout the school with English as a second language were making very good progress.

6. How good is the environment for learning?

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	The quality of pastoral care was very good. The school gave an appropriately high priority to the care and welfare of pupils. All staff knew pupils well and had a very good knowledge of their individual emotional, physical and social needs. All staff had been trained in and understood their responsibilities relating to child protection. The school had clear and improved procedures for dealing with any bullying or racial incidents. Pupils interviewed were confident that if they reported any such incidents that they would be dealt with. The school had recently introduced a new personal safety programme, <i>Keeping Myself Safe</i> , which included safety on the Internet. The school had very effective arrangements in place for the transfer of pupils from the nursery into P1 and from P7 to Firrhill High School.

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The quality of accommodation and facilities was very good. Pupils were rightly proud of their new school. Children in the nursery class benefited from a bright and stimulating learning environment within the main building. Nursery staff had plans in place to improve further the outside area to widen the children’s learning experiences. Teaching and communal areas were attractive and well equipped. Most classrooms were of a good size and facilitated active approaches to learning. The school building was well maintained and kept clean. There was appropriate access to all parts of the school buildings by users with restricted mobility. Pupils had regular access to extensive grounds, including grass and tarmac areas marked out for games. A notable feature was the outdoor classroom built in the grounds with support from parents and the community. The school had a good range of equipment to support a variety of play and pupils benefited from the involvement of the Active Schools coordinator. The school had appropriate arrangements for security.</p>
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	<p>Morale among pupils and staff was high. There was a strong sense of a new school community having been established since the merger. Almost all pupils were polite and courteous. Across the school, behaviour was very good. However, at times a few pupils did not always show respect for each other or for staff. The school had effective arrangements to reward pupils’ achievements and successes. Pupils were very well motivated by certificates for achievements, merits and awards for ‘class of the week’. Most staff used praise effectively to encourage and engage pupils in their learning. Staff did not consistently have sufficiently high enough expectations of pupils’ attainment or for the quality of their work. The pupil council had developed the uniform code and pupils had designed the new school badge. Pupils in P7 took responsibility as playground monitors and through supporting younger pupils with reading. The school celebrated festivals such as Diwali and the Chinese New Year. The school had identified the need to ensure that all staff had opportunities to develop their awareness and understanding of key issues relating to equality. Arrangements for religious observance were well planned and appropriate. Overall, arrangements for ensuring equality, fairness and promoting racial equality were good.</p>

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	The school had established excellent partnerships with parents, the recently formed Parent Council, and the wider community. The constitution for the Parent Council was regarded as a model of its kind by the education authority. Parents received helpful newsletters which outlined school events and recent achievements and an annual standards and quality report. Parents were active in supporting pupils' learning through helping in the school with educational visits and additional activities. They received informative written reports on their children's progress and had very good opportunities to learn about developments and to meet staff. Parents had contributed a great deal to a range of important developments in accommodation and supporting teachers' professional development. The school was taking useful steps to improve the involvement of parents in pupils' learning through, for example, setting and sharing learning targets. Parents of pupils with additional support needs were very closely involved in working with the school to support their children.

7. Leading and improving the school

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

Pentland Primary School and Nursery Class provided a good and improving standard of education for its pupils. Staff worked well together and provided a high quality of pastoral care. Provision for pupils with additional support needs was a notable strength as was the school's partnership with parents. Pupils were happy at school and many benefited from their participation in a range of out-of-school hours activities and visits, including residential experiences for pupils at P6 and P7. While a few pupils occasionally displayed challenging behaviour, staff consistently and effectively promoted positive behaviour and good citizenship. Attainment in English language and mathematics was good overall, though there remained room for further improvement, especially in mathematics. The school now needed to ensure that its initiatives to promote active learning and critical thinking were taken forward and firmly embedded across all areas of the curriculum.

The overall quality of leadership was very good. The headteacher had succeeded in establishing a strong sense of community since the opening of the new school. She had a clear vision for the future based on improving learning and teaching and raising attainment. She knew staff well and had led initiatives to improve the school by building on their strengths and providing support where necessary. She encouraged staff to develop their skills and staff at all stages were actively engaged in helping to take forward the work of the school. The headteacher was very well supported by a depute headteacher and an acting principal teacher. The depute headteacher made an

outstanding contribution and carried out an extensive remit with energy, commitment and a very high degree of professionalism. The acting principal teacher was well regarded by staff and made a useful contribution. The school's approach to self-evaluation was very good. Senior managers used a range of approaches, including consulting with pupils and parents, to evaluate the work of the school. They monitored teachers' plans and pupils' work, made visits to classrooms and provided helpful oral and written feedback to teachers. Such visits now needed to focus more closely and consistently on key aspects of learning and teaching. Senior managers met teachers regularly throughout the year to track and monitor individual pupils' attainment and progress. The productive relationships within the school, the quality of leadership and staff's commitment to pupils, meant that with the support of the education authority, the school was very well placed to improve further.

Nursery staff were familiar with the Scottish Social Services Codes of Practice and their implications for the nursery. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were three requirements for the provider relating to recruitment. The Care Commission has still to inspect if these requirements have been addressed.

Main points for action

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

- ensure that lessons provide sufficient pace and challenge to motivate pupils and allow all to make progress in line with their capabilities;
- continue to improve attainment especially in mathematics and among higher-attaining pupils; and
- develop existing approaches to classroom monitoring to ensure a consistently close focus on key aspects of learning and teaching.

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

Nick Pepin
HM Inspector

19 February 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?	
Structure of the curriculum	good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	adequate
Pupils' attainment in English language	good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	good

How well are pupils' learning needs met?	
Meeting pupils' needs	very good

How good is the environment for learning?	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	very good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	good
Equality and fairness	good
Partnership with parents, the Parent Council, and the community	excellent

Leading and improving the school	
Leadership of the headteacher	very good
Leadership across the school	very good
Self-evaluation	very good

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.

<p>What parents thought the school did well</p>	<p>What parents think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided stimulating and challenging school work. • Explained how they could support their child with homework. • Kept the school buildings in good order. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a clearer idea of the school's priorities for improvement.
<p>What pupils thought the school did well</p>	<p>What pupils think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers listened to them, explained things clearly and expected them to work as hard as they could. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large number thought the behaviour of pupils wasn't good and that staff weren't good at dealing with bullying.
<p>What staff thought the school did well</p>	<p>What staff think the school could do better</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff worked hard to maintain good relations with the community. • Training and professional development time was well used. • The school dealt effectively with any instances of bullying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff thought communication could be improved.

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 Children and Families, 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, T1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8371. 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@spso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.spso.org.uk.

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