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## 1. Background

New Abbey Primary School was inspected in May 2007 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, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

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 New Abbey and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection the roll was 52. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Exceptionally effective leadership from the headteacher.
- The well organised curriculum with its emphasis on education for citizenship, environmental education and personal and social development.
- Improving levels of attainment in English language and mathematics.
- An inclusive school culture.
- Strong relationships with the wider community.

## 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.

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

Parents, pupils and staff were very positive about all aspects of the school. Parents felt welcome within the school and appreciated the quality of information they received about their children's progress and welfare. They were pleased with the school's very good reputation, the quality of its leadership and its effective response to any concerns they had. Pupils felt safe, well cared for and enjoyed being at the school. They liked the way they were given responsibility for important aspects of school life. Staff were very positive about the management of the school. They felt valued, well led and part of an effective team.

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

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

The quality of the curriculum was very good. There was appropriate breadth and balance at all stages, with effective steps taken to ensure progression and continuity in pupils' learning. The school provided two hours of physical education per week for all pupils, despite the limited indoor facilities available within the building. There was particularly creative use of available time to develop a sustained whole school approach to education for citizenship. In particular there was a focus on issues related to ecology, through the many planned opportunities for personal and social development staff were currently increasing the opportunities for pupils at the early stages to experience active learning through play. The quality of teaching was good overall. Staff used an appropriate range of approaches, with consistent emphasis placed on paired and group discussion. Lessons were well organised and prepared. Some at the middle stages were particularly lively and imaginative in the approaches used, and in the way pupils were encouraged to express their own views on a wide range of topics. Staff made good efforts to ensure pupils were made fully aware of lesson aims and reviewed regularly with pupils what had been learned. In most lessons there was good questioning and explanation by teachers. In a few lessons, increased pace and impact at the start of lessons was required. There was effective use of information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning across the school. Homework was regular and well planned.

Pupils were well motivated and hard working. Virtually all were consistently on task throughout lessons. From P1 onwards, they were capable of working independently and taking responsibility for their learning. They responded well to the good range of opportunities to work collaboratively, to discuss their work and present their ideas. At all stages, pupils accessed and presented information using ICT independently. In a few lessons at the upper stages, increased opportunities for independent thinking and creativity were needed.

The school took very good steps to develop pupils' wider achievements through a well planned range of personal and social development activities, within and outwith the school. Pupils at all stages were given significant areas of personal responsibility for helping others, including acting as house captains, buddies, monitors and organisers. They responded exceptionally well to the opportunities to contribute their ideas for the improvement of the school through the pupil council, the school nutrition action group and the Eco Committee. At P6/P7, pupils had benefited from the annual residential education experience through developing their teamworking skills. Pupils at all stages worked with

members of the wider community in the redevelopment of the school grounds. They were also involved in a very wide range of community events, sporting, cultural and charity activities. Overall, the school provided pupils with well planned opportunities to gain practical experience in teamwork and enterprise, and to develop a sense of responsibility as young citizens.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Attainment had improved consistently over the last three years. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels in listening, talking, reading and writing. Many were attaining these levels earlier than normally might be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were making very good progress from their prior levels of attainment. Pupils at the early stages were communicating well orally and developing a good range of early literacy skills. Thereafter, pupils listened well to instructions and for information. Pupils at all stages were articulate and able to convey information and express their views coherently in discussion. Pupils read accurately and with comprehension, although the fluency of their reading at the middle stages needed to improve. Most were interested in books and authors and had good levels of knowledge about language. Pupils were able to write at length for a wide range of purposes. The quality of poetry, personal and report writing was particularly good. Standards of presentation and handwriting were variable.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. Attainment had improved consistently over the last three years. Almost all pupils were attaining appropriate national levels of attainment. A significant number of pupils were attaining these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils requiring support in aspects of mathematics were making appropriate progress. At all stages, pupils could organise and present information accurately in a range of graphs related to practical contexts for investigation. For example, pupils at P5 had carried out a local survey as part of the school travel plan and presented the information on a variety of graphs. Almost all pupils completed mental and written calculations with accuracy. However, their speed of recall of number and multiplication facts was, at times, too slow. By P7, pupils could carry out calculations confidently, involving fractions, percentages and decimals, money and measurement. Most pupils had a good knowledge and understanding of shape, position and movement. Pupils at the early stages could identify and discuss the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Across the school, pupils were developing their skills in problem-solving and enquiry. However, they were less familiar with possible problem solving strategies.

## **5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?**

The headteacher and staff had a good knowledge of individual pupils' learning needs. Most tasks and activities were well matched to the range of pupils' needs. Pupils were responding well to increased involvement in setting their own learning targets. However, in a few lessons the activities required more challenge to ensure that higher attaining pupils achieved their full potential. Support staff worked very well with teachers and pupils and provided valuable support in classes. The school had effective systems in place for meeting the needs of pupils who needed additional support with their learning. The visiting support

for learning teacher worked closely with class teachers to provide support for pupils within the classroom. They reviewed learning targets regularly and discussed pupils' progress with parents. The school had developed positive links with a range of agencies to provide targeted support for individual pupils with particular needs.

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

Aspect	Comment
Pastoral care	<p>The overall quality of pastoral care was very good. All staff showed a high commitment towards the care and welfare of pupils. They knew pupils and their families well. The school had clear arrangements in place for the care and welfare of pupils. These included policies on child protection and anti-bullying. Pupils felt safe and secure and enjoyed being at school. They understood what to do if they had any concerns. The personal, social and health programme placed an appropriate emphasis on personal relationships and substance misuse. Staff, including catering staff, actively promoted healthy lifestyles through health weeks, a 'fruity Friday' and advice on healthy eating. Effective procedures were in place for pupils entering at P1 and for those at P7 transferring to Dumfries Academy.</p>
Quality of accommodation and facilities	<p>The overall quality of the accommodation and facilities was good. Teaching areas were well equipped. The school made very effective use of the available facilities, with an excellent display policy which helped to reinforce pupils' learning and the school's commitment to its own eco code. Teaching resources were very well organised. The school was clean and well maintained, but levels of heating were hard to control and at times affected pupils' learning adversely. Indoor facilities for physical education were limited. There was appropriate entrance security and access for people with physical disabilities. Pupils and the community had been fully involved in the design of garden and wildlife areas, as part of the school's fulfilment of its recent Eco Schools Scotland Green Flag award. There remained a need for measures to improve pedestrian safety in the vicinity of the school.</p>

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p>Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality</p>	<p>Relationships between staff and pupils were very good. Pupils were very proud of their school. They identified with it strongly, largely through their wide range of responsibilities for improving the school environment and contributing to the school community as buddies, mediators and playground leaders. Staff morale was high due to the sense of teamwork which pervaded all school activities. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and sense of responsibility. Pupils were fully involved in the development of the school's improvement plan, code of conduct, eco code, travel plan and playground improvement initiatives. Weekly assemblies were used very well to foster the sense of school community and to recognise personal achievements. There were regular opportunities for religious observance. There was a strong sense of equality, fairness and inclusion throughout the school, based on encouraging respect for others. The school had a clear race equality policy. It was now well placed to extend training for new members of staff in the promotion of race equality through the curriculum.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents and the community</p>	<p>The school had developed very strong partnerships with parents and the local community. There were productive links with the School Board and the PTA, both of which supported school initiatives strongly. Plans were well in hand for the establishment of the planned Parent Council. The school made sustained efforts to engage parents in school activities, and to inform them about their children's progress. Communication with parents had improved significantly through the introduction of a weekly mailbag initiative. Parents were invited to express their views regularly on a wide range of aspects of school life. They had been consulted fully on the school improvement plan, the travel plan, sensitive health issues and the regeneration of the school grounds and their views had been reflected in each. The school had an exceptionally wide range of links with the wider community. Productive relationships had been established with local businesses, Dumfries College, the Barony College, the Forestry Commission, Historic Scotland and the RSPB. Many members of the community contributed their skills and experience to the school. There had been productive links with the education authority's CREATE team for the cultural dimension of school life.</p>

## 7. Leading and improving the school

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

New Abbey Primary School served its pupils and community very well. The ethos of the school was very positive. The headteacher and staff worked hard for the benefit of pupils and provided them with consistently good learning opportunities. Pupils attained very well in English language and mathematics. They were also benefiting from the wide range of opportunities for personal and social development, arising from the citizenship and community activities undertaken by the school.

The headteacher provided the school with excellent leadership. She had a very clear vision for the pupils of the school. Her high degree of professional competence, particularly in relation to the curriculum, ensured strong direction and a sustained momentum for improvement. She had developed very effective teamwork with recently appointed staff. She monitored and evaluated the progress of the school exceptionally well, with rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and tracking of pupils' progress. She had a detailed knowledge of pupils' progress and a realistic view of where further improvements were needed. She had also been proactive in addressing successfully aspects of the curriculum, as in English language and mathematics, where pupils' attainment required to be strengthened further. Staff had responded well and were developing a strong culture of self-evaluation through the sharing of good practice. The school was very well placed for further development and improvement.

### **Main points for action**

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

- continue curriculum development, particularly in encouraging pupils' capacities for independent thinking, creativity and personal expression; and
- continue to improve teaching and learning, through increasing the pace and challenge of lessons at the upper stages.



### **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.

Lachlan MacCallum  
HM Inspector

4 September 2007

## 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.

<b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b>	
Structure of the curriculum	very good
The teaching process	good
Pupils' learning experiences	good
Pupils' attainment in English language	very good
Pupils' attainment in mathematics	very good

<b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b>	
Meeting pupils' needs	good

<b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>	
Pastoral care	very good
Accommodation and facilities	good
Climate and relationships	very good
Expectations and promoting achievement	very good
Equality and fairness	very good
Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community	excellent

<b>Leading and improving the school</b>	
Leadership of the headteacher	excellent
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.

<b>What parents thought the school did well</b>	<b>What parents think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children enjoyed school and found school work stimulating and challenging.</li> <li>• The school had a good reputation in the community.</li> <li>• They felt welcome in the school.</li> <li>• If they had concerns the school would do something about them.</li> <li>• They received helpful information about their children's progress.</li> <li>• The school was well led.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>
<b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>	<b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They enjoyed being at school and felt safe and well looked after.</li> <li>• They got on well with other pupils.</li> <li>• The behaviour of pupils was good.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work hard, but would help them if they were having difficulties with class work.</li> <li>• Teachers listened to them, and they had a say in how to make the school better.</li> <li>• They knew what to do if they were upset and were confident the school dealt effectively with bullying.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>

<b>What staff thought the school did well</b>	<b>What staff think the school could do better</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school was well led.</li> <li>• They liked working in the school.</li> <li>• There was good communication between senior managers and staff.</li> <li>• Senior managers worked well as a team.</li> <li>• There was effective communication among staff.</li> <li>• Continuous professional development was productive.</li> <li>• There was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul>

## **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 Corporate Director of Education and Community 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, T1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8293. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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If you have a concern about this report, you should write in the first instance to our Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management Unit, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston, EH54 6GA. You can also e-mail [HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk). A copy of our complaints procedure is available from this office, by telephoning 01506 600200 or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://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 (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@sps.org.uk](mailto:ask@sps.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.sps.org.uk](http://www.sps.org.uk).

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