

**Cedars School of Excellence  
Greenock  
11 October 2005**

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## 1. Background

Cedars School of Excellence was inspected in June 2005. 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 capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language, mathematics, history within social subjects and physical education within expressive arts.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the Board of Governors and a group of parents.

The school is a Christian independent school situated in Greenock. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 38, with 34 in the primary school, and four in the secondary school. Pupils in S2 had left to join S3 classes in their receiving schools. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- A strong sense of community and belonging.
- Relationships between staff and pupils and the provision for meeting their pastoral and learning needs.
- Consistently high quality learning and teaching.
- The vision and leadership of the headteacher.
- A wide range of educational opportunities.
- Pupils' skills in choral singing.

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

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to S2 pupils and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

Parents and carers, pupils and staff were all highly positive about the school. Many parents felt that the school had made a significant difference to their children's wellbeing and their overall progress. Pupils enjoyed being in small classes and getting trips out of school on a regular basis. Most made very positive comments about learning, their teachers and the friendly ethos. Staff thought that teamwork was very good and all responded well to the leadership of the headteacher. Many felt privileged to work in the school.

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

### **The curriculum, learning and teaching**

The overall structure of the curriculum was very good. Staff used teaching time creatively and effectively to meet pupils' needs and to provide a wide range of educational opportunities. This included a commitment to using local facilities and visits out of school. Volunteer staff visited the school on a regular basis to share their skills and enhance the curriculum. The overall quality of teaching was very good. Teachers consistently shared the purposes of lessons with pupils, gave clear explanations and took time to summarise with pupils what they had learned. They had very good interactions with pupils and used encouragement and challenge effectively. They used a wide range of approaches including effective use of questioning, good interactive teaching and homework.

Pupils responded very well to their teachers, the brisk pace of learning and the good level of challenge. They had recently started to evaluate their own learning and were doing this well. They had very good interactions with each other and collaborated very well on group activities. Pupils took good responsibility for many aspects of their learning and were clearly capable of taking more. They were developing good skills and knowledge across a range of areas and applying them in practical situations. Pupils at P1 were learning a basic vocabulary in French, related to food, in preparation for a forthcoming health week. In science, pupils at S1 were developing a good understanding of static electricity through their discussions with each other and the teacher. They could devise fair tests and evaluate their findings. In geography, pupils at P4 to P7 were developing a good understanding of their local area. At S1, pupils were developing their understanding of how society and the economy work and how different employment skills relate to that. Across the school, pupils lacked confidence in mapping skills.

Pupils were developing skills in citizenship within school and the wider community. Pupils at P1 to P3 were trying to make their playground litter free and beginning to analyse the problems that litter causes. Pupils at P4 to P7 were planning how to develop the school playground. They had also run a successful enterprise activity to raise funds for the Tsunami appeal. Across the school, pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT) were developing well. Through their links with a school for pupils with hearing impairment, pupils were developing a good understanding of British sign language (BSL). Pupils regularly performed musicals to a very high standard in their linked church and also to older members of the local community. Pupils' skills in choral singing were very good. They sang with a very clear tone and were able to hold harmonies confidently and accurately. A good number of pupils could play musical instruments. A few pupils had won prizes for their art work.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was good. All pupils were making good progress and most were attaining at appropriate national levels. Some pupils were exceeding expected levels especially at the early stages. Pupils listened and talked well to each other about a wide range of topics in groups which were led by adults. They were less able to listen to each other in groups without an adult. Most pupils read regularly for pleasure and could talk about aspects such as the storyline and the characters. They were less confident when identifying more complex features of the writer's craft. Their understanding of different types of genre was not well enough developed. Across the school, pupils wrote regularly for a good range of purposes.

Some pupils in P1 could write independently about personal experiences. Pupils at P5 and P6 wrote good descriptions about their feelings. By S2 pupils could take alternative viewpoints and write at length.

## **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was good. All pupils were making good progress with most pupils achieving or exceeding national levels of attainment. Pupils interpreted graphs and charts very well and could collate information to produce a graph. They were not confident in using ICT to produce graphs. Pupils had a good understanding of almost all aspects of number, money and measurement. At P1 and P2, pupils were making a very good start to their number work. Across all stages, pupils were confident and accurate in written calculation but the speed of their mental calculations was too slow. Throughout the school, pupils had developed a very good knowledge of shape, position and movement. Pupils at P3 to P7 recognised the properties of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Pupils in S1 were very confident in calculating volume and showed a very good understanding of angles. At all stages pupils lacked understanding of the appropriate strategies to use when solving problems.

## **History within social subjects**

The quality of pupils' attainment in history was good with almost all pupils making good progress in their classwork. Pupils in P1 to P3 showed a good awareness of life in the recent past. They could interpret photographs and make comparisons between their own lives and the lives of their grandparents. At P4 to P7, pupils could recall information about life during the time of the Roman Empire. They related this knowledge to visits they had undertaken, for example, to the Antonine Wall. Pupils in S1 showed a very good awareness of cause and effect. They could analyse various aspects of the American War of Independence and show the impact on American society. Pupils made very good comparisons between this period of history and others studied such as life in Edinburgh during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At all stages, pupils talked confidently about historical sources and how they had used them during their investigations. Pupils' understanding of placing periods of history in a historical timeline were less well developed.

## **Physical education within expressive arts**

The quality of pupils' attainment in physical education was very good. Almost all pupils were making very good progress in their classwork. From P1 to P3, pupils showed good skills in passing a ball to each other while moving. In football, at P4 and P5, pupils could successfully control a ball around obstacles. From P6 to S2, pupils had learned a good range of skills across a range of games such as rugby, football, tennis and unihoc. Pupils in P7 to S1 demonstrated very good skills in ball control when practising football skills. They could swim continuously using several different strokes for a sustained period. By S1 pupils had a sound understanding of the links between exercise, diet and physical fitness. Pupils at S1 and S2 knew how to evaluate their own progress and that of their peers. These skills had not yet been developed with pupils in P1 to P7.

## 5. How well are pupils supported?

The quality of pastoral care was very good. Staff gave very good attention to the care and welfare of pupils and had been trained in dealing with child protection issues. They responded sensitively to pupils' individual needs. Pupils felt very secure and happy in the school. They knew what to do if they had concerns over issues such as bullying or their own personal safety. Effective arrangements were in place for pupils entering P1 and transferring into other secondary schools.

The school provided very good support for all pupils. Teachers planned effectively to meet the needs of all pupils of different ages in the same class. They also enabled pupils to work in groups in other classes in order to meet their needs more fully. Staff were particularly attentive to pupils requiring additional support in their learning. More able pupils were challenged appropriately. The headteacher met regularly with staff to discuss next steps in learning for all pupils. The school made effective use of a variety of personnel within its wider community who were available to support the school in meeting pupils' learning needs.

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

Aspect	Comment
Quality of accommodation and facilities	The school had moved into its current accommodation at the start of the school year. Staff, working with members of the church community, had made commendable progress in ensuring that the building was fit for purpose and a good place for learning. Building work was ongoing. As yet, there was limited access for disabled users. The lack of a main gate at the entrance to the playground presented a significant breach in otherwise good security arrangements.
Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality	Staff had created a very supportive community ethos within the school and with the wider church group. Staff morale and teamwork were very good and pupils were very happy in the school. Pupils' relationships with each other and their overall behaviour was very good. They identified strongly with the school and felt included. They had a good understanding of the needs of others including the need for racial equality. Daily assemblies were very well used for religious observance and thinking about different moral issues. Pupils responded well to the high expectations set by staff. Their achievements in a range of areas were celebrated regularly.

Aspect	Comment
Partnership with parents and the community	Partnerships with parents and carers, the linked church and the local community were very good. Parents received good information on their children's progress through formal written reports, parents' evenings and more regular, informal contacts. They were consulted on sensitive issues. The school drew on the skills and strengths of the wider church community to support and enhance aspects of pupils' learning as appropriate.

## 7. Improving the school

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

Cedars School of Excellence provided a very good quality of education for its pupils. Staff worked very well together, provided high quality teaching and care and were committed to the ongoing improvement of the school. Pupils were achieving very well in a range of areas. Relationships with parents were very good and the support of the wider church community was positive and productive. The headteacher had a clear vision for the school which she shared effectively with staff. She was a well skilled practitioner who applied her experience wisely. She was well supported by the staff team who shared aspects of leadership. The Board of Governors was very supportive of the school's work and shared the vision for its ongoing development.

Staff evaluated their own work and the overall work of the school. They found feedback from classroom observations and their plans useful in improving their own practice. They kept good records which enabled them to track pupils' progress over time. There was room for staff to improve the differences in approaches used between secondary and primary staff and to make better use of each other's skills to take a longer view of pupils' progress from P1 through to S2. Cedars School has a high capacity for improvement. It aspires towards excellence and should continue to do so.

### Main points for action

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

- continue to raise pupils' overall attainment in English language, mathematics and history;
- develop self-evaluation further in order to ensure a clearer focus on learning, teaching and achievement from P1 to S2; and
- as a matter of priority, continue to work with the relevant agency in order to address the security risk presented by the lack of a gate at the entrance to the playground.

### **What happens next?**

Within a month of the publication of this report HM Inspectors will seek a report from the school and the Board of Governors indicating how the security issue highlighted in the third point for action has been addressed. This report should be shared with parents and carers.

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 Board of Governors have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the other main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report the Board of Governors, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Joan Mackay  
HM Inspector

11 October 2005

## **Appendix 1 Indicators of quality**

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

- Structure of the curriculum
- The teaching process
- Pupils' learning experiences
- Pupils' attainment in physical education
- Meeting pupils' needs
- Pastoral care
- Climate and relationships
- Expectations and promoting achievement
- Equality and fairness
- Partnership with parents, the Board of Governors and the community
- Leadership

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

- Pupils' attainment in English language
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics
- Pupils' attainment in history
- Accommodation and facilities
- 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>• Their children enjoyed being at school.</li> <li>• Staff showed concern for their children’s welfare and would deal with any matters of concern raised.</li> <li>• They felt welcome in school and were consulted about decisions affecting their children.</li> <li>• Staff encouraged children to work to the best of their ability and let parents know about their progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A very small number of parents wanted more information on how they could support their children with homework and more guidance on the standard of work expected.</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>• They enjoyed being at school and felt safe and well looked after.</li> <li>• Teachers expected them to work as hard as they could, told them how they were getting on with their work and when they had done something well.</li> <li>• Teachers let them know how to improve their learning and helped them when they found work too hard.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</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 and thought it was well led.</li> <li>• There was mutual respect between staff and pupils.</li> <li>• Teachers set high standards for pupils’ attainment and ensured that pupils got constructive feedback about their work.</li> <li>• There was regular staff discussion about how to achieve school priorities.</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 chairperson of the Board of Governors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, T1 Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8142. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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### **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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 600265 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. 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](mailto:enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)

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