**Houston Primary School and Nursery Class  
Renfrewshire Council**

**18 March 2008**

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**1. Background**

Houston 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 class, 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[1](http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/inspection/8622221%20Houston%20PS.html#11).

The school serves the village of Houston. At the time of the inspection the roll was 501, including 73 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.

**2. Key strengths**

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| HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.   * Outstanding ethos in the nursery and school, based on strong values and high quality pastoral care. * Partnerships with parents and the wider community. * Excellent leadership and management skills of the headteacher and promoted staff. * Enthusiasm for learning of nursery children and school pupils. * The approaches of the school and nursery class to self-evaluation and the hard working staff team committed to continuous improvement. * Teachers’ use of information and communications technology (ICT) to create stimulating lessons. |

**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.

Parents with children attending the nursery class were highly satisfied with the quality of the provision. Overall, parents of primary pupils expressed a high level of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the school. They felt that the school was well led and staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. They thought the school was held in high esteem in the community and that staff made them feel welcome. Parents thought that the school set high standards for pupils. Almost all pupils were satisfied with almost all areas of the work of the school. They said that they supported one another well and enjoyed learning. They thought they were treated fairly and teachers knew them well. Staff also expressed a high degree of satisfaction with all aspects of the school. They felt that they communicated effectively and maintained very good relationships with each other. They enjoyed working in the school and praised the pupils for their enthusiasm and achievements. All staff held the headteacher in high esteem.

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

**Pupils’ learning experiences and achievements**

The curriculum for children in the nursery class provided very good breadth and balance across the five key aspects of learning. Staff made very effective use of the playroom space and outdoor play area to support this. They provided children with a wide range of interesting activities. Staff skilfully engaged children in the planning process to ensure their interests were developed within the learning zones. At the primary stages, the overall structure and balance of the curriculum was very good. The school’s guidance on the curriculum provided very good support to staff. Teachers provided a broad range of varied experiences for pupils. Staff placed an appropriate emphasis on health promotion and pupils were actively encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. They used ICT effectively across the curriculum. Pupils at all stages were learning French effectively. The visiting specialist teacher enhanced and supported the music curriculum well. All classes had two hours of physical education each week, in line with national recommendations. All staff in the nursery were warm and caring in their interactions with children. They were skilled in their use of questions and dialogue to engage with children and challenge their thinking. Staff made appropriate use of praise to celebrate children’s achievements and were sensitive in supporting their needs and interests in play situations. Across the primary stages, the overall quality of teaching was very good. Teachers set high expectations for pupils in almost all lessons observed. They used praise effectively and gave clear explanations and instructions. They selected appropriate resources and took account of pupils’ prior learning. Almost all teachers shared with pupils the aims of their classwork and the criteria against which it was assessed. They provided them with focused feedback and clear targets for improving their work. Teachers provided varied homework activities to support pupils’ learning. For example, at P7, teachers made effective use of ICT to motivate pupils in developing mapping skills.

Nursery staff provided high quality play experiences. Approaches developed in the nursery were extended successfully into the early stages of primary. The overall quality of pupils’ learning across P1 to P7 was very good. Pupils worked effectively in groups. For example, they were skilled in working independently in groups and individually without the need for teacher support. Pupils were actively engaged in their learning and carried out a variety of tasks with enthusiasm. Staff used ICT effectively to support pupils’ learning. For example, pupils at P3 worked individually and in pairs when practising reading skills using computers. At P7, pupils collaborated effectively to produce presentations for a technology challenge.

Almost all nursery children were confident in role play, making music and expressing their individual creativity through painting and collage. They were developing an awareness of other cultures. Almost all children were developing an appropriate awareness of themselves and others. They were also developing very good coordination through a range of challenging activities in the Total Soccer Programme. They were gaining independence, making decisions and contributing to planning and learning goals. The nursery and school successfully developed children’s and pupils’ wider achievements. At all primary stages, pupils were developing a very good awareness of their responsibilities to themselves and to one another. They were given opportunities to make decisions within the pupil council and the school’s Eco Committee. They had brought credit to themselves and the school by achieving an Eco Schools (Scotland) green flag in the nursery and a silver award in the school. They were involving parents and local businesses to help develop their skills in enterprise across the school. Many pupils took part in an extensive range of activities outwith school hours, including handbell ringing, country dancing and basketball. At P7, pupils developed good relationships through the monitor system and were involved in organising lunchtime games for younger pupils. The school’s positive approaches to behaviour management had contributed to motivating pupils to succeed. Pupils had become aware of the need for exercise through a whole-school focus on keeping healthy. They had participated in health promoting activities that encouraged them to eat healthily. An impressive number of upper school pupils had developed good skills in playing musical instruments and played confidently together in bands. The choir sang together tunefully and interacted with audiences engagingly. The pupil council regularly updated news items on the school’s website.

**English language**

Children in the nursery were making very good progress in communication and language. They were confident when talking to adults and to one another. Almost all listened well to adults and they enjoyed listening to stories and sharing books with one another. They were learning about the Scots language through stories and rhymes. Most were able to recognise their own name and some children could recognise the shape and sound of familiar letters and were able to write their own name. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Levels of attainment in listening, talking, reading and writing had been maintained at a high level over several years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels. Across the school, the majority of pupils achieved levels of reading and writing earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils with additional support needs were well supported and making good progress. Almost all pupils coped well with their classwork. Across the school, almost all pupils had well-developed skills in listening and talking. Overall, they listened well in class to staff and to one another. Pupils were developing good skills in addressing an audience and older pupils had taken part in debates. Pupils had very positive attitudes to reading and most read regularly for pleasure. Most could discuss a range of authors and offer a personal response. By P7, pupils could read aloud fluently and clearly, and with good understanding. At all stages, pupils wrote well for a variety of purposes, including imaginative and personal writing. Pupils’ skills in punctuation, spelling and grammar were well developed and most presented their work well.

**Mathematics**

Children were making very good progress in developing early mathematical skills. Almost all children in the nursery could recognise and name simple shapes. They knew their colours and most could sort and match objects. Most were able to count confidently and were using appropriate mathematical language in play situations. At the primary stages, the overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. High standards had been maintained over several years. Almost all pupils were achieving appropriate national levels of attainment. Significant numbers exceeded these levels. Pupils receiving additional support were progressing well towards individualised learning targets. Across the school, pupils were able to handle and interpret information accurately using an appropriate range of graphs and tables. At all stages, pupils performed mental and written calculations very well. They made effective and regular use of computer software and were skilled in solving calculations involving number, money and measurement. Standards of written presentation were good. At all stages, pupils could identify a range of shapes and describe fully their properties. Pupils’ skills in problem-solving and enquiry were developing well.

**5. How well are pupils’ learning needs met?**

Staff in the nursery regularly observed children and carefully noted their responses to play activities. They used this information well to plan children’s learning. They involved children in identifying their own learning goals and shared these effectively with parents. Assessment documents and folios of children’s work provided useful information about their progress and development. Staff sensitively supported and planned for children with additional support needs to ensure they had access to all aspects of learning within the playroom. The school’s approaches to meeting pupils’ learning needs were very good. Class teachers provided activities and resources which effectively met the needs of almost all pupils. A number of additional teachers provided effective support to pupils. In addition, the network support teacher, the visiting English as an additional language (EAL) teacher and classroom assistants worked very effectively in partnership with teachers to provide well-judged support for individuals and small groups. The depute headteacher had established outstanding systems to enable her to coordinate responses to meeting pupils’ learning needs and monitor their progress. This included giving very good information and support to class teachers. Staff had developed appropriate individualised educational programmes for pupils with specific learning needs. They shared clearly stated learning targets with parents and pupils and reviewed pupils’ progress regularly. As a result of the school’s approaches, almost all pupils were making very good progress. Pupils with EAL were making good progress. Teachers should continue to ensure that all tasks are sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of the highest attaining pupils.

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

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| **Aspect** | **Comment** |
| Pastoral care | Nursery staff provided very good support to children according to their age, ability and confidence, including at transition to P1. Staff were aware of their responsibility to protect children and to ensure a safe, secure environment for learning. The school provided pupils with an excellent level of pastoral support. Pupils felt safe and very well looked after and thought that staff listened to any concerns they might have. All staff placed a high priority on pupils’ care and welfare and were fully aware of child protection procedures. They worked effectively together to create a climate of mutual trust, respect and confidence. Staff dealt appropriately with incidents concerning pupil behaviour, including bullying. Senior managers recorded relevant information about pupils’ progress meticulously. The monitor system enabled pupils in P7 to develop responsible and positive attitudes to others through providing help and support to younger pupils. The school’s approaches to supporting pupils’ social and emotional development were very effective. Pupils encouraged and supported one another at all stages. The school ensured that pupils were well informed about personal safety, relationships and substance misuse. |
| Quality of accommodation and facilities | The quality of the nursery and school accommodation was very good. Nursery staff made effective use of the indoor and outdoor space to enhance children’s learning. The school building and its grounds offered an attractive and stimulating environment for learning. Staff and pupils had created a warm and inviting reception area. The bright, spacious classrooms and general purpose space in the recently-completed extension assisted pupils’ learning. Pupils took great pride in their school and had helped design play areas. The school was making effective use of its accommodation and staff had created stimulating open areas where pupils learned through play and were active in their learning. The entry system provided safe and secure access to the school and all areas of the building were accessible to all users. Teachers used a wide range of ICT resources to enhance children’s and pupils’ experiences, including the use of interactive whiteboards. |
| Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality | Staff in the nursery made children and parents feel very welcome. All children were treated equally and with equal concern. Staff praised children appropriately to acknowledge their efforts and achievements and to build self-esteem. Pupils, staff, parents and community were very proud of the school and identified strongly with it. Relationships throughout the school were excellent and staff and pupil morale was high. Overall, staff had high expectations of achievement and behaviour and used praise effectively to motivate pupils. Pupils’ behaviour was very good. The school organised regular assemblies which provided opportunities for religious observance, worship and celebrating achievement. Staff had developed systematic approaches to promoting race equality and understanding of disability within the curriculum. The school community regularly supported a wide range of charities. Pupils developed a global understanding of citizenship through participating in projects linked to Africa. They had a very good understanding of the needs of others. |
| Partnership with parents and the community | In the nursery, parents were encouraged to contribute to the life of the nursery and to become involved in their children’s learning. Relationships between staff and families were strong. Staff had actively forged links with other pre-school providers within the area and invited them to participate in the school induction programme. Partnership with parents and the local community was excellent. Staff communicated effectively with parents. Teachers produced helpful written progress reports for parents each year. They provided curriculum workshops to explain ways in which parents could support their children’s learning and sensitive issues within the health education programme. The local chaplain provided valued support and made regular visits to the school. The Parent Council was very supportive of the school and took an active interest in its work. Parents, staff and pupils regularly raised funds and actively supported social activities, clubs and events. They had worked effectively together to achieve Eco Schools awards. The school had achieved Charter Mark status. The school had established several useful links with local businesses in support of enterprise projects. The school choir and band regularly performed at well-attended community events. The school had very helpful arrangements in place to support pupils transferring from pre-school into P1. Very effective links had been forged with Gryffe High School and pupils at P7 were well supported when transferring to S1. |

**7. Leading and improving the school**

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

Houston Primary School and Nursery Class provided education of a very high standard. The school and nursery class offered educational experiences which supported pupils’ academic and personal and social development very effectively. The school and nursery class were held in high esteem in the community and had an outstanding ethos based on strong partnerships. Pupils brought credit to themselves and the school through their successes in a wide range of achievements and very good levels of attainment. Overall, the school had a high capacity to sustain high standards through its commitment to continuous improvement.

The headteacher was an outstanding manager and excellent leader. She was highly respected by pupils, parents and staff. She had established effective teamwork and consulted staff about the development and implementation of a range of useful policies and programmes. She planned strategically and had a sound professional knowledge of current national developments in education. The headteacher set high expectations and demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement. The senior management team worked together efficiently and effectively. The quality of leadership across the school was excellent. The two depute headteachers fulfilled their extensive remits to a very high standard. Communication amongst managers and staff was exemplary. The three principal teachers supported staff well and led teams with confidence. They provided well-judged support and guidance to other staff including newly qualified teachers. Staff were empowered by managers and took active roles and responsibilities for the leadership of several initiatives providing positive outcomes for pupils. The full involvement of stakeholders, shared vision and commitment of staff to continuous improvement was outstanding. The school’s approaches to self-evaluation were well established and embedded in the culture of improvement. Staff worked as professional teams and were ambitious to do well. Monitoring activities were managed systematically. The school community took a joined-up approach to improvement across a wide range of areas in the school’s work. The tracking of pupils’ progress was thorough and shared effectively with staff. Staff valued feedback from regular classroom observations. The standards and quality report was evaluative and based on a range of evidence, including feedback from pupils and parents, to produce an accurate report of the school’s work.

Nursery staff were aware of the implications of the Scottish Social Services Council’s Codes of Practice. At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were three recommendations and one requirement. These had been addressed.

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| **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:   * maintain high standards and continue to seek further improvement in line with the school’s improvement plan and processes of self-evaluation. |

**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.

Susan Gow  
HM Inspector

18 March 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.

|  |  |
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| **How good are learning, teaching and achievement?** | |
| Structure of the curriculum | very good |
| The teaching process | very good |
| Pupils’ learning experiences | very good |
| Pupils’ attainment in English language | very good |
| Pupils’ attainment in mathematics | very good |
| **How well are pupils’ learning needs met?** | |
| Meeting pupils’ needs | very good |
| **How good is the environment for learning?** | |
| Pastoral care | excellent |
| Accommodation and facilities | very good |
| Climate and relationships | excellent |
| Expectations and promoting achievement | very good |
| Equality and fairness | very good |
| Partnership with parents, the School Council, and the community | excellent |
| **Leading and improving the school** | |
| Leadership of the headteacher | excellent |
| Leadership across the school | excellent |
| Self-evaluation | excellent |

**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.

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| **What parents thought the school did well** | **What parents think the school could do better** |
| * Leadership of the school. * The reputation of the school in the community. * Parents felt welcome in the school. * They thought the school explained how parents can support their children’s learning. * Staff showed concern for the care and welfare of their children. | * There were no significant issues. |
| **What pupils thought the school did well** | **What pupils think the school could do better** |
| * Teachers expected pupils to work hard. * They felt safe and healthy and well looked after. * Teachers knew pupils well. * Pupils were involved in decision making. * They were praised by teachers when they did something well. | * There were no significant issues. |
| **What staff thought the school did well** | **What staff think the school could do better** |
| * The school was well led. * Staff worked hard to maintain good relationships with the local community. * They celebrated pupils’ achievements. * They showed care and concern for the welfare of the pupils. * They set high standards for pupils’ attainment. | * There were no significant issues. |

**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 Leisure, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LG or by telephoning 0141 242 0100. Copies are also available on our website <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 and Communications Team, 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 <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@spso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spso.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman’s office can be obtained from the website: <http://www.spso.org.uk/>.

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**Footnotes**

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