

19 May 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Holm Primary School and Nursery Class
The Highland Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including approaches to developing the curriculum and children's involvement in setting targets for their own learning. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children in the nursery and at the primary stages are keen to learn and are achieving well. All children say that they enjoy coming to school and that staff are helping them to become more confident. Nursery children are increasingly deciding what and how they will learn during their play. For example, they voted to learn about space and to have weekly baking sessions. They are learning to co-operate with each other by sharing toys and taking turns. Children are proud of their individual learning journey folders. Staff should develop the use of these folders further to encourage children to talk about the next steps on their learning journey. Overall, teachers in the primary classes plan interesting activities that often enable children to learn together in groups. Children willingly contribute to projects and activities linked to their school and community, such as their work on the Eco Schools Scotland initiative and their recent whole-school topic to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the school. Children have made a good start to setting personal targets for their learning and to evaluating their own work. They now need to be given more opportunities to develop high-order skills such as creativity and problem-solving, and to have more opportunities to learn outdoors. Children benefit from participating in a wide range of sporting, cultural and musical activities and often achieve awards at local and national competitions.

Children are making good progress in their learning. In the nursery, most children listen well at circle time and can express their ideas and opinions confidently to adults. They have explored what makes a good question and have created their own questions to learn about how babies are cared for. Most children enjoy books and listening to stories. They benefit from lots of opportunities to develop their early writing skills and write their own name when they self-register each day. A few children enjoy the challenge of writing less familiar words, such as the names of their friends. Most

children are developing early numeracy skills well. In their pretend shop, they are exploring the use of money in a meaningful way. They would benefit from more opportunities to develop their early reading, writing and numeracy skills in real-life situations and nursery routines. Overall, across the primary classes, most children are making good progress in literacy and English language. Almost all children listen attentively and most build very well on each other's contributions during group and class discussions. At the upper stages, children are developing their listening and talking skills by taking part in topical debates. Staff have recently introduced new approaches to teaching writing and this is leading to improvement. Across the primary stages, children write well, often linked to topic work or to an enterprise task. Children are encouraged to read for pleasure and many children choose to do so. At the upper stages, children would now benefit from reading and talking about more challenging texts. Staff have identified the need to review and improve the teaching of phonics beyond the early stages. Across the primary classes, most children are making good progress in mathematics. Children are learning the relevance of numeracy and mathematics through activities and tasks linked well to school life. For example, all classes are using the Easter Fayre as a context for developing children's skills in using money. Children at P7 are enthusiastic about mathematics. They enjoy the ways in which their teacher makes mathematics lessons interesting for them. They are able to use problem-solving strategies well and can explain their thinking. At P4, children are good at estimating the reasonableness of their answers, and their speed, fluency and accuracy in mental mathematics is very good. The school has identified the need to ensure that children's application of their skills in mental mathematics is strong at all primary stages.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

In the nursery and at the primary stages, staff work well as a team to provide a very caring and supportive ethos for children. All staff contribute to helping children feel safe and well cared for. They proactively seek advice and help from a range of partners and charities in order to support children and their families. In the nursery class, staff meet the learning needs of children well. They take good account of what children already know and provide support to those who need extra help. Parents are increasingly involved in children's learning, for example through organised sessions such as Rhyme Time and Stay and Play, and through the routine sharing of children's learning journey folders. In the primary classes, most lessons are pitched at the right level for most children. However, tasks and activities are at times not challenging enough to meet the needs of higher-achieving children. Whilst staff are good at identifying children who have barriers to their learning, aspects of the school's arrangements for supporting children with additional needs require to be improved. We have asked staff to provide clearer, better-planned support for children who need individual programmes for their learning.

The curriculum ensures a broad and balanced range of learning for all children. In the nursery and at the primary stages, staff are improving programmes of work by using Curriculum for Excellence guidance. Teachers have recently improved the programmes for English and mathematics. As a result, children now use information and communications technology in more creative ways to enhance their learning, for example to produce blogs and make movies of puppet shows which they produce. Staff should now continue with their plans to develop the curriculum further to ensure

that children progress well across all areas of their learning. Children are particularly well supported in moving from the Pink Panthers pre-school group into nursery, and then as they move on to P1. Early years staff are working together closely to develop these transition arrangements yet further. Well established links with Inverness Royal Academy help children at P7 to prepare well for secondary school.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher knows the strengths and development needs of the school very well. She is well respected by children, parents and staff. They appreciate the way she has improved the school ethos for all and led developments in learning and teaching and in refreshing the curriculum. In order to maintain this pace of change in a sustainable and effective way, the remits of the school leadership team need to be reviewed. Along with staff, the leadership team should use self-evaluation approaches in a more focused way to bring about further improvements. Children across the school are now more involved in taking aspects of school improvement forward through working in their citizenship groups. Parents are also keen to work with staff and children in helping to improve the school.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Articulate and confident children who are keen to learn and very proud of their school and nursery.
- Very effective approaches to ensuring younger children make a smooth start to nursery and to P1.
- The commitment of all staff to providing a caring and supportive ethos for learning.
- The headteacher's leadership in improving the school ethos, managing change and in leading learning.

We discussed with staff and The Highland Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Improve arrangements for meeting the needs of children who require additional support.
- Use self-evaluation in a focused way to secure further improvements in children's attainment; learning and teaching approaches; and curriculum development.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, The Highland Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/HolmPrimarySchoolHighland.asp>

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