



**Helmsdale Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Highland Council
30 June 2009**

We published a report on Helmsdale Primary School and Nursery Class in September 2008. That report set out key strengths of the school and main points for action.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in May 2009. It tells you about improvements since the original inspection in the quality of education which the school¹ provides. It also comments on how the school is getting on with the main points for action. First we focus on changes in the core work of the school. We explain how the school has got better at helping children to learn and benefit from being at the school. Next we look at the key processes which enable this to happen, including the involvement of parents². Our report also describes developments in the 'ethos' of the school, by which we mean how well children are cared for and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally we comment on improvements in leadership to help the school achieve its aims.

A copy of this report has been placed on the HMIE website www.hmie.gov.uk. Where applicable, you will also find descriptions of good practice in the school and analyses of questionnaire returns.

¹ The term 'school' is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Helmsdale Primary School and Nursery Class serves the village of Helmsdale and the surrounding area. A new headteacher took up post in August 2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Courteous, motivated and well-behaved children.
- The approach to active learning and purposeful play in the nursery and the early stages.
- Positive impact of the headteacher in leading school improvement.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

In the nursery, children are achieving success across all areas of their learning. They are becoming increasingly independent, developing good social skills and growing in confidence. Within early literacy and numeracy, children are making very good progress. The majority of children from P1 to P7 are making good progress in listening, talking, reading and mathematics. Children's attainment in writing in P4 to P7 has fallen in recent years. The new headteacher is taking positive steps to tackle this decline. Children listen well in class and are confident in talking in groups. Children at the early stages are developing a better understanding of early number work. Across the school, children enjoy working together. Children are showing good skills in music and physical education.

4. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

Staff are beginning to develop aspects of the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Teachers ensure children in the nursery and the early stages have frequent opportunities to learn well through active play. Staff are starting to plan more effectively to link different aspects of children's learning. At all stages children now have regular opportunities to work together in pairs or groups to develop and extend

their learning. Staff are beginning to use assessment information more effectively to monitor children's progress. As a result, more tasks, activities and resources are now better matched to meet most children's needs. Support staff work closely with teachers and provide well-judged help to individuals and small groups of children.

5. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

The school receives effective support and help from the Parent Council. Older children successfully support younger ones, helping them at morning intervals and lunchtimes. The headteacher is beginning to discuss teaching, learning, planning and assessment with teachers and give helpful advice and support. Teachers are improving the procedures to ensure children's safety within the playground. Arrangements are now in place to allow some staff to visit other schools to observe different teaching methods and share what they are doing. These initiatives are helping to improve the quality of children's learning.

6. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

The school is beginning to make further improvements to courses, programmes, and assessment arrangements. Staff now have much higher expectations of children's attainment and achievement. They now need to continue to develop more challenging and enjoyable learning activities which will ensure attainment improves. They also need to continue to help children to understand how they can improve their work.

7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The school is taking forward improvements and is making progress. The headteacher has a sound understanding of the school's strengths

and areas for improvement. He recognises the need to continue to improve the good start he has made in meeting his vision for the school. Overall, the school now performs better and shows a strong capacity to continue to improve.

8. What happens next?

Staff are taking positive early steps towards making Helmsdale Primary School a better school. In some areas they are making significant progress. Further work is required to sustain the positive changes and improve children's attainment. We will continue to engage with the school and education authority. As set out in the original report of September 2008, we will carry out a further follow-through visit to the school. We will report to parents, within one year of the publication of this report, on the extent of the improvement that has been achieved.

HM Inspector: David M Martin
30 June 2009

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