



**Helmsdale Primary School
and Nursery Class
The Highland Council
15 June 2010**

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. We carried out a follow-through inspection in May 2009 and published a report on that visit in June 2009.

This follow-through report is based on an inspection visit which was carried out in April 2010. 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 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.

Contents

1. The school
2. Particular strengths of the school
3. How well do children learn and achieve?
4. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?
5. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?
6. Does the school have high expectations of all children?
7. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?
8. What happens next?

1. The school

Helmsdale Primary School and Nursery Class serves the village of Helmsdale and the surrounding area.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Enthusiastic and well-motivated children in the nursery and P1-P3 classes.
- Children's positive behaviour.
- Promising start made by the school in taking forward initiatives related to *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Staff's effective contributions to the care and welfare of children.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

Children in the nursery class are motivated and keen to learn. Teachers at the early stages continue to build very effectively on how children learn in the nursery. At all stages, children now work well together in pairs and small groups. Most children benefit from examples of very effective teaching, in which they are encouraged to be responsible, independent learners and to think for themselves. This practice is still not yet consistent across the school. The school has maintained good standards of attainment in listening, talking, reading, writing and mathematics. Most children are achieving expected national levels. Those in the early stages are achieving earlier than might normally be expected. These early gains are still not maintained as children progress through the middle and upper stages.

In the nursery class, staff provide an enjoyable and appropriate curriculum. They discuss and review children's learning experiences effectively. At the primary stages, teachers provide an appropriately well structured variety of learning experiences. Teachers have made a good start to implementing aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Children are continuing to develop an appropriate awareness of the need to care for the environment. As a result, the school has won an

Eco-Schools Scotland Bronze Award. Children still do not receive two hours of good quality physical education each week.

In the nursery class, staff are sensitive to children's family circumstances. Staff are aware of factors that might hinder learning and address them promptly through well planned group activities. In the primary classes, teachers and support staff give most children useful individual support which helps them in their learning. Most tasks and activities set by teachers are now at the correct level of difficulty for children. The quality of feedback and pace of learning still varies too much throughout the school. Pupils in the middle and upper stages are still too often unsure of what they need to do to improve. Children with additional support needs are now making better progress in their learning.

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

Teamwork among staff is improving. Most staff now work well together to support the learning of all pupils, including those with additional support needs. Improved monitoring of young people's progress is helping to clarify where their strengths lie and what their next steps in learning are. School staff's communication with parents is now more regular and of a higher quality. Parents have appropriate opportunities to share the start of the day with children in the nursery. Staff continue to work well with a range of agencies in supporting children's learning.

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

Children willingly take on responsibilities and support each other well. Staff are committed to improving the school community. They are appropriately consulted on how to improve the life and work of the school. They feel that their views are not always acted upon. The

headteacher recognises there is further scope to develop the leadership role of children and staff in the life of the school. The headteacher now regularly visits classes to observe the quality of learning and teaching and comments on teachers' learning plans. He also tracks children's progress in reading, writing and mathematics and regularly monitors children's written work. These arrangements are not yet sufficiently systematic and rigorous.

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

All staff expect high standards from pupils in their learning, behaviour and attendance. All children respond well. Teachers make effective use of praise and the school's system of rewards to celebrate children's achievements. Assemblies provide very good opportunities to celebrate children's achievement and for religious observance. All staff are knowledgeable about child protection procedures. Arrangements for monitoring children's attendance are effective and well managed.

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

The headteacher is highly committed to the school and to improving the quality of children's experiences. He has gained the trust of almost all parents and most staff. He has successfully introduced a number of important changes in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. The headteacher now needs to monitor the work of the school more effectively to ensure that all children achieve their full potential. With the continuing support of the education authority, the school has the capacity to improve further.

8. What happens next?

There is evidence of significant improvement since the original inspection. The school now performs better overall. Arrangements for

self-evaluation and meeting learning needs are now at a satisfactory level or better. We will make no further visits to the school in connection with the inspection report of September 2008. As part of ongoing liaison between HMIE and the education authority, our District Inspector will continue to monitor the school's progress.

HM Inspector: David Martin

15 June 2010

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

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