



**Farr High School
Bettyhill
By Thurso
The Highland Council
3 November 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMI) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, young people and the local community know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with school staff how they can improve the quality of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the headteacher and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities which young people are involved in. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school and a report on the learning community surrounding the school.

¹ 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

Farr High School is a non-denominational school which serves the parishes of Tongue and Farr in North Sutherland. The roll was 93 when the inspection was carried out in September 2009. Young people's attendance was above the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The range and quality of young people's achievements.
- The inclusive approach to supporting the learning of those with additional support needs.

3. Example of Good Practice

- The impact of the successful Young Enterprise group in developing young people's confidence and business and communication skills.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Most young people enjoy learning and think that the school helps to make them more confident and achieve success in a range of areas. In the majority of lessons, particularly in mathematics, young people work well together. They respond very positively when they receive constructive feedback on their strengths and helpful advice on how to perform better, for example, in English. This good practice is not yet a consistent feature of young people's experiences across the school. The school has begun to help young people take more responsibility for their own achievement through setting targets with them. All staff now need to help young people to understand what they need to do to improve their learning and reach their targets. In too many lessons the work does not engage young people sufficiently. As a result, not all make enough progress.

Almost all young people are developing skills and confidence through sporting, cultural and music activities. In particular, those in the highly successful enterprise group demonstrate well-developed business and communication skills. Several successful musicians represent the school in national and provincial Mods, choirs and orchestras. The popular shinty club is successfully involving the wider community in the sport. Staff now need to monitor young people's achievements more carefully to ensure that they are developing skills in a broad range of areas.

At S1 and S2, most young people achieve appropriate standards and are making progress from prior levels of attainment in English, mathematics and other subjects. Almost all young people achieve five or more awards at General level or better, with more than a third achieving Credit awards. In recent years, most young people presented at Higher have achieved success. Pupils need to build on their success at Standard Grade to ensure that they achieve the best they can at Higher. Young people with additional support needs are making appropriate progress in their learning. The school is effective at ensuring that almost all young people leaving school enter employment or further or higher education.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Young people at S1 and S2 study a suitably broad range of subjects, including information and communications technology (ICT). They can gain a national qualification in ICT by the end of S2. All young people at S3 and S4 study a course of up to nine Standard Grades designed to develop their skills for life and work. A number of weaknesses in their learning experiences prevent them from building effectively on the skills and qualities they already have. Staff make changes to the subject choices available from year to year to meet young people's needs and interests. Young people with particular needs follow a curriculum designed to help them achieve success. In addition to Intermediate or Higher courses at S5 and S6, young people can follow distance-learning courses to study subjects not available in school.

Young people do not always receive the support they need to achieve success in these courses. In a few subjects, there are no courses available for pupils to progress to at the next stage in their studies. At all stages, young people benefit from opportunities to learn through fieldwork, educational trips, work experience and outdoor education. Staff are beginning to consider how to improve the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. For example, they aim to build more effectively on young people's prior learning in numeracy when they move from P7 to S1. Young people are improving their literacy skills through an innovative media studies project in the English department. The school does not yet provide young people with two hours of good quality physical education each week.

In a majority of subjects, but not all, teachers plan activities which are relevant to young people and build on their prior learning. In most senior classes, young people get good support from one another as well as from the teacher. In other subjects, there is scope for teachers to plan activities which build better on what young people already know. Too often, they set young people tasks such as textbook exercises or worksheets, which are too easy or not stimulating enough. As a result, higher-attaining pupils in particular do not always make appropriate progress. The school meets the learning needs of young people who need additional support very well. Almost all staff are skilful at identifying and understanding those needs, and sharing key information. Support staff provide effective help for individual young people in classes.

5. How well do staff work with others to support young people's learning?

Staff work very effectively with a number of community partners and other agencies to enhance young people's learning. The local media help the school to share its work with the local community and celebrate young people's achievements. Overall, parents value the opportunities for achievement and learning that the school provides. They are not yet fully involved in supporting their children's learning.

Members of the new Parent Council are enthusiastic about involving parents more effectively in supporting the school's work. A range of supportive health partners help staff plan courses and there is scope for staff to involve them even more in this process. Young people leaving school are well supported by the school's links with Careers Scotland. Partnerships with local companies broaden the range of modern apprenticeship opportunities available to young people.

6. Are staff and young people actively involved in improving their school community?

Staff have recently begun to work in faculty groups planning improvements to the school's work. Recently, a few staff have begun to analyse young people's achievement carefully and listen to their views about their learning. Where this has been most effective, it has led to improvement in young people's learning. Senior managers have not ensured that teachers' continuing professional development has always been supported effectively. They are not giving a strong enough lead in ensuring that the whole school evaluates and improves the quality of its own work. As a result, the quality of learning and teaching is not of a consistently high standard across the school. Staff need to take better account of parents' views when planning improvements. Young people value the opportunity that a few teachers give them to provide feedback on their learning. They say that they would like to have more influence in improving the school through having more real responsibility.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all young people?

Almost all staff support young people and work well with them to resolve issues. Most young people appreciate the school's arrangements for keeping them safe and say that any concerns they report are addressed promptly by staff. Older buddies help young people at S1 to settle in to the school. Overall, staff have appropriately high expectations of what young people can achieve. Staff

expectations of the standard of work in day-to-day lessons are not always high enough. Staff have given effective attention to helping young people to understand the needs of others, particularly those who need assistance with aspects of learning, communication or mobility. As a result, almost all young people look after one another well. There is scope for the school to do more to develop young people's understanding of issues of equality and diversity in the wider society. There are insufficient opportunities for religious observance.

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

The headteacher has established very positive relationships with the local community. The depute headteacher and the three principal teachers support the headteacher effectively in the day-to-day running of the school. The headteacher needs to provide a stronger lead in ensuring consistently high-quality learning and teaching across the school. All senior managers now need to focus on developing the curriculum, improving young people's learning experiences and meeting their learning needs more effectively.

9. What happens next?

We are confident that, with support from the education authority, the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education. Our District Inspector will maintain contact with the education authority to monitor improvements in leadership for learning and the arrangements for evaluating the school's provision.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Ensure consistently high-quality learning experiences for all young people.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum.
- Involve the whole school community in evaluating the school's work so that good practice is identified and shared, and action taken to bring about improvement where necessary.
- Improve the effectiveness of senior management.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?* Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Farr High School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	weak

Managing Inspector: Jacqueline Sinclair

3 November 2009

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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