

25 November 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

**Durness Primary School
The Highland Council**

Recently, as you may know, I inspected your child's school. During my visit, I talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. I 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 me the school's successes and priorities for improvement. I looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including science, outdoor learning and children's involvement in their own learning. As a result, I was able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the school, children are learning well. They are very proud of their school and community. They are very well-behaved and demonstrate great care and consideration for each other. As a result, there is a strong family ethos in the school. Overall, children are motivated and interested in their learning. Older children talk confidently about their learning and achievements. Staff provide children with different opportunities to be active in their learning and to work with their peers in pairs and groups. Children respond well to these approaches. In partnership with a local business, older children enjoyed great success in the P7 Greenpower Energy Goblin Car Project. Children achieve well in a range of musical and sporting events outwith the classroom. Children are developing their leadership skills as they plan and run a range of lunch time clubs. Recently, children organised a very successful school and community event 'Tattie Tuesday' to celebrate the construction of their new polytunnel and selling of vegetables which they had grown at home and school.

Across all stages, children are making good progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Overall, children listen well to each other and to adults. Younger children are developing their skills in talking to a group as they share, for example, how they baked cakes at home. Across the school, children's writing is of a high standard. Older children produce a range of interesting, well-crafted pieces of writing relating to their topic on the Jacobites. Older children demonstrate a keen interest in reading books and confidently discuss the writing styles of their favourite authors. Older children are aware of their learning targets in reading and writing and this is helping them improve in these areas. They would benefit from using similar approaches for numeracy and mathematics. Younger children are confident in addition, subtraction and multiplication. Older children display good skills in number,

money and measurement. Across the school staff need to support children to improve their mental mathematics skills. A few higher achieving children are benefiting from additional challenge in their mathematical thinking as they explore advanced mathematical theories and practice, for example 'Napier's bones'. Across all stages of the school, children produce an interesting and accomplished range of art work. As part of their work on buoyancy, children in the upper stages carried out a detailed and accurate scientific experiment and could explain their findings well. Older children confidently share their knowledge about the Jacobites and their historical significance for the local area.

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

For the most part, staff provide children with activities which motivate them to learn. A few children would benefit from a quicker pace of learning. Younger children would benefit from learning in contexts which are more appropriate for their age. When given the opportunity to learn through play, younger children display a greater interest and enjoyment in their learning. Children who require additional help with learning are given support to help them make progress. However, all staff need to consistently use approaches which will help children to make the best possible progress. When given praise and positive feedback, children respond very well. Staff need to ensure this is a regular feature of their practice. Parents have good opportunities to be involved in their children's learning, for example through their participation in home learning tasks and after school clubs such as 'Durness Diggers'. Staff recognise that they now need to introduce other ways for parents to know more about what and how their children learn.

Across the school, the curriculum provides a broad range of learning for children. The headteacher has increased the pace of curriculum development and this is evident in the recent development of the science programme and the school's approaches to linking learning in topic work. I have asked staff to use these approaches to develop other areas of the curriculum in order to ensure they plan for progression in children's knowledge, understanding and skills. Children regularly use their skills in writing across a range of curriculum areas, for example, in science, as they compile reports. Staff make very good use of the exciting and interesting local area when planning learning. For example, children have regular opportunities to explore a local forest to deepen their understanding of bio-diversity. Taking good account of the context of the school which is situated so close to the sea, older children gained relevant life skills as they learned about water safety and buoyancy as part of a 'Sail away day'. Staff engage very well with the local community to extend children's learning. They invite many visitors to the school to enrich children's learning including the Countryside Ranger and Active School's Co-ordinator. Staff ensure children are supported well as they move on to S1 at Kinlochbervie High School. Good arrangements are in place to ensure children are familiar with future classmates, such as the bi-annual residential trip to Orkney for all senior pupils in the Kinlochbervie Schools' Cluster. There is also a range of after school clubs which children from the different schools attend together. I have asked the school to improve transitions from nursery for children starting P1.

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

At the time of the inspection the school had gone through a period of significant change in relation to the appointment of a new headteacher. The new headteacher is approachable and welcoming. She has worked hard to foster positive relationships with children and staff. Parents report positively about how quickly she responds to their enquiries or concerns. After making necessary changes to the way children and parents enter the school, the headteacher is working hard to ensure parents still feel welcome and part of their child's school experience. She recognises that the school needs to continue to develop ways in which parents are more involved in their children's learning. She has quickly identified the school's strengths and development needs. With her support, staff are beginning to recognise what the school does well and what it needs to improve. Staff are increasingly reflective. They demonstrate a strong commitment to improving children's learning experiences and achievements. Staff work well together and support each other well. They value the opportunities they have within Kinlochbervie associated schools' group to work with other colleagues for their own professional development and in taking forward school improvement. They are supportive of the new headteacher and are keen to bring about improvements in the school.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Very well-behaved children who are proud of their achievements, school and local community.
- Very effective use of the local area to enrich children's learning experiences.
- Positive partnership with parents and the community to support children's learning.
- Headteacher's commitment to securing the best outcomes for all children.

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

- Continue to develop the curriculum as planned.
- Improve consistency in learning and teaching approaches across the school to ensure all children's learning needs are met.
- Continue to develop robust and rigorous strategies to evaluate, monitor and track the work of the school.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

I am satisfied with the overall quality of provision. I am 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.

Jackie Maley
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/DurnessPrimarySchoolHighland.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.