

**Thrumster Primary School  
Wick  
The Highland Council  
1 May 2007**

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## 1. Background

Thrumster Primary School was inspected in January 2007 as part of a national sample of primary education. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated pupils' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and innovation, and its capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on attainment in English language and mathematics.

HM Inspectors examined pupils' work and interviewed groups of pupils, including the pupil council, and staff. Members of the inspection team also met the chairperson of the School Board, representatives of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and a group of parents<sup>1</sup>.

The school serves the village of Thrumster and the surrounding area. The school was part of a local authority pilot for shared headship which involved the headteacher having responsibility for Thrumster Primary School and Watten Primary School. The headteacher of Thrumster Primary School had been appointed to lead both schools six months ago. The pilot project was due to be reviewed in June 2008. At the time of the inspection the roll of Thrumster Primary School was 30, including nine children in the nursery class. The proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals was below the national average. Pupils' attendance was above the national average.

The work of the nursery class was not included in this inspection.

## 2. Key strengths

HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths.

- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- The teamwork of staff and their high expectations of pupils' achievements.
- Pupils' attainment in English language and mathematics.
- The overall quality of teaching and the strong emphasis on meeting the needs of all pupils.
- The leadership of the headteacher.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

### **3. What are the views of parents, pupils and staff?**

HM Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires issued to all parents, P4 to P7 pupils, and to all staff. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 2.

All parents were very positive about the school. They indicated a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school and most commented favourably on the leadership of the headteacher. Parents and visitors said they felt welcome in the school and that the school contributed much to the local community. Parents were particularly pleased with the school's efforts to involve them with their children's learning. Pupils said that they enjoyed school and that they felt safe and well looked after. They reported that teachers explained clearly how their learning could be improved and listened to their views on how to make the school better. Staff all praised the leadership of the headteacher. They thought that relationships with pupils and parents were of a very high quality.

### **4. How good are learning, teaching and achievement?**

#### **Pupils' learning experiences and achievements**

The school provided a broad and well-balanced curriculum which helped develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Teachers had effectively developed approaches to teaching reading and writing by allocating additional time to English language. Pupils' skills in information and communications technology (ICT), English language and mathematics were developed very well across the curriculum. Pupils at all stages had good opportunities to learn through play. Pupils developed a broad range of skills in physical education. All pupils made good progress in improving their swimming skills in a weekly swimming lesson. Staff made effective use of expertise within the local community, such as the countryside ranger, to extend pupils' experiences. The overall quality of teaching was very good. Teachers provided clear explanations and used a range of practical activities to motivate and engage all pupils in their learning. They used praise appropriately and made skilful use of questioning to check and extend pupils' understanding. They provided pupils with opportunities to work in groups to talk about texts they had read in order to improve their writing. Teachers used a broad and effective range of homework activities to continue pupils' learning at home.

The quality of pupils' learning was good. Pupils were hard working, well motivated and confident learners. At all stages, they cooperated productively with others when working in small groups, for example, in writing, social subjects and physical education activities. The school had begun to successfully encourage pupils to take responsibility for improving their learning by discussing their targets in writing. These approaches were yet to be applied more widely across the curriculum. In a few lessons the learning activity did not appeal to the interests of several pupils in classes.

The school took good steps to help pupils develop their wider achievements. Staff monitored pupils' wider achievements and encouraged them to extend their involvement in out-of-school activities. Pupils' achievements outside school were celebrated in assemblies. Regular visits and visitors to the school, including scientists, artists and authors, had helped pupils to understand the relevance of lessons. Pupils confidently demonstrated their singing and instrumental skills in the Caithness Music

Festival. All pupils regularly participated in inter-school sports competitions in which they demonstrated good sportsmanship. Pupils had developed a good understanding of their local area by working with the archaeological trust and the countryside ranger to design local amenities. Pupils had developed informed attitudes to environmental issues through the school's initial activities towards becoming an Eco School. They had formed an awareness of life in other communities through fundraising for a number of charities and writing to pen-friends in Malawi.

### **English language**

The overall quality of attainment in English language was very good. Almost all pupils achieved appropriate national levels of attainment for their stage in listening, talking, reading and writing. A majority of pupils achieved these levels in reading earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils who experienced difficulty with aspects of reading and writing were making very good progress towards individual learning targets. At all stages, pupils' listening and talking skills were well developed. At the upper stages pupils expressed their views confidently and considered the contributions of others in group discussions. At all stages, all pupils read fluently and with good comprehension. Pupils in the early stages could identify characters, discuss the main ideas of a story and make predictions. At P6 and P7, pupils understood how writers achieved specific effects and this had helped improve their own writing. Across the school, pupils planned their written work very well and wrote for a variety of purposes. For example, at P2 and P3, pupils used their wide vocabulary to describe animals. Standards of handwriting and presentation were consistently high.

### **Mathematics**

The overall quality of attainment in mathematics was very good. All pupils had achieved appropriate national levels and most had achieved these levels earlier than might normally be expected. Pupils had used a range of graphs to display with accuracy information related to their environmental studies topics. By the upper stages, pupils could use spreadsheets effectively to record data from their investigations. At all stages, pupils performed appropriate written and mental calculations quickly and accurately. Pupils at P1 could tell the time of main events in the school day. Those at P2 and P3 were able to calculate change from purchases when using small denomination coins. Throughout the school, pupils could measure length accurately. By the upper stages they confidently discussed the properties of a range of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Across the school, pupils were making good progress with problem solving and were able to use appropriate strategies to help them solve problems. Pupils at P4 to P7 successfully completed weekly mathematical challenges.

## **5. How well are pupils' learning needs met?**

Class teachers supported pupils well in their learning. They paid appropriate attention to pupils' prior learning and used individual and group teaching effectively. The classroom assistant used well chosen activities with groups of pupils to support their learning. Staff monitored pupils' performance effectively to identify pupils whose learning would benefit from short-term specific support. The support for learning teacher provided valuable support. She had planned a range of appropriate tasks and activities for pupils to do in class and in small groups. She used ICT well to motivate pupils. Pupils with specific needs had

appropriate individualised educational programmes (IEPs) which had very clear long- and short-term learning targets. These IEPs had been produced following effective consultation with parents and pupils. A number of pupils had produced helpful learning plans which contained their learning targets and strategies to achieve these.

## 6. How good is the environment for learning?

| Aspect                                  | Comment  |
|---|--|
| Pastoral care                           | <p>Staff knew pupils very well as individuals and responded sensitively to their needs. Pupils felt safe and well looked after in school and knew what to do if they had any concerns. The health education programme and a recent health week effectively promoted pupils' understanding of a healthy lifestyle. Staff worked closely with other agencies to promote pupils' well being and development. Effective transition arrangements from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Wick High School ensured that pupils' learning and pastoral needs were well supported. Appropriate policies were in place and consistently applied for child protection, the administration of medicines, the prevention of racism and bullying and ensuring pupils' safety on the Internet.</p>   |
| Quality of accommodation and facilities | <p>The quality of accommodation was adequate overall. Classrooms and corridors were bright, spacious, and well organised. Staff had used corridor wall-space well to display pupils' achievements. A general purpose room and the nearby village hall were well used to provide appropriate spaces for out-of-class activities including drama, games and assemblies. Pupils used the well maintained tarmac playground and playing fields for free play and team games. The school was developing pupils' knowledge of the natural environment and forming partnerships with the local community by developing wildlife areas. Appropriate security arrangements were in place. At the time of the inspection ICT resources were due to be upgraded. The Internet connection was sometimes unreliable. Pupils' toilets lacked warm water for hand washing. The building was not accessible to disabled users.</p> |

| Aspect   | Comment  |
|--|--|
| Climate and relationships, expectations and promoting achievement and equality | <p>There was a warm and caring climate in school. Staff worked very well as a team, supporting one another and sharing good practice. Pupils were confident, well mannered and happy. They were encouraged by the school's rewards system to be positive and hard working. Staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attainment. The pupil council had implemented improvements such as playground equipment and a buddy system. Pupils responded well to opportunities to take responsibility for improving the school by being junior road safety officers or joining the nutrition action group. Weekly assemblies involving the local minister provided appropriate opportunities for religious observance. The school's racial equality policy encouraged respect and ensured that any incidents were dealt with effectively. Pupils had developed a good understanding of other religions through well-planned religious and moral education lessons. The school did not develop pupils' understanding of race relations and cultural diversity effectively enough.</p> |
| Partnership with parents and the community                                     | <p>Parents had very good opportunities to be involved with their children's learning. The school provided a very good range of helpful information to parents including leaflets on areas of the curriculum. Staff effectively involved parents in supporting their children's learning and informed them about their children's progress. They provided parents with detailed reports which identified future learning targets. Parents were well informed about the school's health programme and were effectively consulted on sensitive health issues. A majority of parents were involved with either the School Board or the PTA. Both bodies were actively involved in giving effective support to the school. Staff had built effective links with the wider community to support learning. Staff were making effective use of the close relationship with Watten Primary School to work collaboratively on improving aspects of the curriculum.</p>   |

## 7. Leading and improving the school

Appendix 1 provides HM Inspectors' overall evaluation of the work of the school.

Thrumster Primary School provided a very good quality of education for its pupils. All staff worked together to provide a caring learning environment in which pupils were well supported. The quality of teaching was very good. Pupils had a positive attitude to learning and were responding well to opportunities to work with one another to improve their learning. Their attainment in English language and mathematics was very good.

The headteacher provided very good leadership. She had a clear vision for the work of the school and was effective in bringing about continuous improvement. Her approachable and considerate style of management had earned the respect and confidence of pupils, staff, parents and the wider community. Appropriate arrangements were in place for communication and decision making when the headteacher was in Watten Primary School. She operated effective procedures for monitoring pupils' attainment and progress. She gave staff strong support in developing key areas of the curriculum, including improvements in the teaching of reading and writing. The headteacher had put in place a number of robust approaches to self-evaluation. She effectively monitored pupils' work and achievements, teachers' forward plans and classroom teaching. Her feedback to staff was evaluative and supportive. She regularly worked alongside staff in classes to demonstrate good practice. The school's improvement plan had clear and appropriate priorities, and staff had benefited from related staff development. The school had not yet involved parents fully in the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and its plans for improvement. Thrumster Primary School was well placed to continue to improve, and provide a high quality education for its pupils.

### **Main points for action**

The school and education authority should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, they should take account of the need to:

- continue to develop approaches to involve pupils in improving their learning across the curriculum;
- develop the role of parents in the school's approaches to monitoring and evaluation; and
- improve the school's information and communications technology resources and toilet facilities.

### **What happens next?**

As a result of the high performance, the strong record of improvement and the very effective leadership of this school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The school and the education authority have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. Within two years of the publication of this report the education authority, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents.

Jacqueline Sinclair  
HM Inspector

1 May 2007

## Appendix 1 Indicators of quality

The sections in the table below follow the order in this report. You can find the main comments made about each of the quality indicators in those sections. However, aspects of some quality indicators are relevant to other sections of the report and may also be mentioned in those other sections.

| <b>How good are learning, teaching and achievement?</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Structure of the curriculum                             | very good |
| The teaching process                                    | very good |
| Pupils' learning experiences                            | good      |
| Pupils' attainment in English language                  | very good |
| Pupils' attainment in mathematics                       | very good |

| <b>How well are pupils' learning needs met?</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Meeting pupils' needs                           | very good |

| <b>How good is the environment for learning?</b>              |           |
|---|-----------|
| Pastoral care   | very good |
| Accommodation and facilities                                  | adequate  |
| Climate and relationships                                     | very good |
| Expectations and promoting achievement                        | very good |
| Equality and fairness   | good      |
| Partnership with parents, the School Board, and the community | very good |

| <b>Leading and improving the school</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Leadership of the headteacher           | very good |
| Self-evaluation                         | good      |

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors:

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

## Appendix 2 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below. Where any one group had five or less respondees then, in order to maintain confidentiality, the analysis is not provided.

| <b>What parents thought the school did well</b>  | <b>What parents think the school could do better</b>                                  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurtured good relationships and mutual respect between teachers and pupils.</li> <li>• Set high standards and encouraged pupils to work hard.</li> <li>• Provided good information on their children's progress and explained how they could support their children with homework.</li> <li>• Maintained a good reputation in the local community, and benefited from strong leadership.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul> |
| <b>What pupils thought the school did well</b>   | <b>What pupils think the school could do better</b>                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helped them to feel safe and get on well with each other.</li> <li>• Told them when they had done well and explained how their learning could be improved.</li> <li>• Encouraged them to express their opinions on how to make the school better.</li> <li>• Gave them the right amount of homework and checked it.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant issues.</li> </ul> |

## **How can you contact us?**

### **If you would like an additional copy of this report**

Copies of this report have been sent to the headteacher and school staff, the Acting Director of Education, Culture & Sport, local councillors and appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament. Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, Longman House, 28 Longman Road, Inverness, IV1 1SF or by telephoning 01463 253115. Copies are also available on our website [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

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#### **Our complaints procedure**

If you have a concern about this report, you should contact our Complaints Manager by telephoning 01506 600258/9 or write to Complaints Manager, HMIE Business Management Unit, Second Floor, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA. You can also email [HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HMIEComplaints@hmie.gsi.gov.uk). A copy of the HMIE Feedback and Complaints leaflet is available from this office by telephoning the above telephone number or from our website at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to the SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330 (fax 0800 377 7331) or e-mail: [ask@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk). More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk).

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