



**Castletown Primary School
and Nursery Class
Thurso
The Highland Council
19 January 2010**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, children and the local community know whether their school² 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 in which children are involved. We also gather the views of children, 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 children 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 children 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 children. 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 children, parents and staff. 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.

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

² The term 'school' includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate.

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1. The school

Castletown Primary School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class. It serves the village of Castletown and surrounding area. The roll was 148, including 13 in the nursery class, when the inspection was carried out in November 2009. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Happy and confident children.
- Positive school ethos.
- Children's attainment in mathematics.
- The commitment of staff to improving children's learning.
- The contributions to the life of the school made by support and janitorial staff.

3. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In the nursery class, children are happy and settled. They know each other well and are developing friendships. They can share, take turns and concentrate on their chosen activity. Children speak confidently to staff and each other. Children do not do enough talking about and planning their own learning. Across the primary classes, almost all children are enthusiastic and keen learners. Children work well together in pairs and individually. They can take on responsibility for their learning and are becoming more independent. Across the school, children are becoming increasingly active in their learning. They are starting to identify targets to improve their own work. At most stages, children successfully plan aspects of their class topic work.

In the nursery class, children care for and explore the local environment. Children have planted bulbs and have visited Dunnet Forest. They are able to experiment with paint and other materials to create their own pictures. Children enjoy singing and making music

with percussion instruments. They are confident at using digital cameras. At the primary stages, children achieve success both inside and outside the classroom. They show good skills in citizenship through for example, raising money for several charities. Children show an awareness of environmental issues through the work of the eco committee. In P3/4, children have an understanding of aspects of life in Ancient Egypt. Children in P5/6 have created interesting art work in the style of Piet Mondrian. At all stages children can explain what they need to do to keep healthy. They participate well in sporting events such as football, netball and have achieved recent success in touch rugby. Children have gained positive qualities of leadership through serving as members of the pupil council and eco committee. They have used their enterprise skills to design and organise the sale of tea towels. Children perform well when leading assemblies and at the Caithness Music Festival.

Children in the nursery class are making satisfactory progress in their learning and development. They listen well to stories. They are good at expressing their ideas and discuss well. They can read their names and a few are keen to write their name. They do not use their language skills well in play. Most children can count confidently and recognise numbers from one to ten. In primary classes, children are making very good progress in mathematics and good progress in English language. Most children are attaining appropriate national levels in English language and almost all in mathematics. Staff have identified correctly the need to strengthen attainment in writing. Most children listen well to adults and respond appropriately in carrying out instructions. At a few stages, they are less skilled at listening to each other when working in groups. Almost all children show good skills in talking and by P7 are able to make presentations to the class. At all stages, children can discuss books which they enjoy reading and describe what makes a good story. Most show an interest in reading and enjoy reading for pleasure. At most stages, children can produce good pieces of writing but sometimes do not structure their written work well. In mathematics, almost all children have very good skills in mental and written number calculations.

Children can interpret and create charts and graphs for a range of purposes. Children's skills in identifying and using problem solving strategies are less secure.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

In the nursery class, staff provide a broad curriculum. They are at the early stages of developing early literacy and numeracy through play, in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff encourage children to be creative in art and to take part in energetic activity. They do not make enough use of the outdoor area to extend children's learning. Across the primary classes, staff plan a broad and balanced curriculum for children. Staff have made a positive start to developing the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. The school has made a good start to developing children's literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Staff have developed a wide range of successful enterprise activities for children. These include children organising school assemblies. Across the school, visits and visitors enrich children's learning. At P7, staff develop children's social skills through a well-planned residential visit to Glasgow. At almost all stages staff involve children in applying their skills in information and communications technology across the curriculum. The school does not yet provide children with two hours of good quality physical education each week.

In the nursery class, approaches to meeting children's learning needs are satisfactory. Staff are sensitive and supportive in their interactions with children. They are at the early stages of involving children in planning and reviewing their learning. Nursery staff do not use their observations of children's learning well enough to plan next steps in learning. Across the primary classes, staff meet children's learning needs well. Tasks and activities are at the right level of difficulty for almost all children. Support staff work effectively with teachers and provide well-judged help to individuals and small groups of children. Individualised educational programmes help a few children requiring additional support with their learning but staff do not involve children fully in setting and reviewing learning targets. Teachers tell children

the purposes of lessons and give clear explanations. They use questioning to encourage children's thinking and sum up what children have been learning at the end of lessons. Children benefit from regular and appropriate homework.

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

Staff use useful partnerships to improve children's learning. The school works well with the school chaplain. It makes effective use of local resources such as the Castletown Heritage Centre. The Parent Council supports the school well. The headteacher consults parents about school developments and sensitive health issues. Staff keep parents informed about children's progress through helpful reports. Termly class newsletters keep parents informed further about children's learning. Nursery staff invite parents to 'Stay and Play' sessions. The school has appropriate procedures in place to respond to complaints and concerns. Staff support children well to move from the nursery class to P1 and from P7 to S1 at Thurso High School.

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

Children successfully take on a range of responsibilities around the school. Older children enjoy acting as buddies to younger children. Across the school, children express their views well through the pupil council. They think that the pupil council has made a difference to their school. Support assistants and the janitor actively support the work of the school. Staff are reflective about their work and have shared good practice to improve learning and teaching across the school. In the primary classes and nursery class, strategies to monitor education including learning and teaching and children's progress are in place. The headteacher does not yet use these strategies rigorously enough to make children's education consistently effective.

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

Children and staff are proud of their school. They show care and respect for each other. Relationships among children and staff are very positive. Staff provide children with a high level of care and support and follow the school's child protection procedures. Children feel happy and are confident in school. Staff recognise and celebrate children's achievements at assemblies and on the school's news board. Staff keep achievement folders for each child as they move from stage to stage. They have high expectations of children's classroom behaviour, learning and achievements. The school promotes children's understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Children have regular opportunities to participate in religious observance.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and gives a high priority to supporting children and staff. She has able support from a principal teacher. They have worked well with staff to improve learning and teaching. With staff, she has identified priorities for improvement and has produced a plan to guide these developments. Staff work together to enhance children's learning.

8. 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.

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

- Enhance children's experiences in the nursery class.
- Strengthen attainment in writing.
- Use self-evaluation to provide children with consistently high standards of education.
- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class, there was one recommendation, which has been addressed.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. 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 and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Castletown Primary School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

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

Nursery class

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Children's experiences	satisfactory
Meeting learning needs	satisfactory

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school and nursery class.

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: Alan Urquhart
19 January 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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Text phone users can contact us on 01506 600 236. This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as the line will not connect you to a member of staff.

You can find our complaints procedure on our website www.hmie.gov.uk or alternatively you can contact our Complaints Manager, at the address above or by telephoning 01506 600259.

Where the school has a nursery class, you can contact the Complaints Coordinator, Headquarters, Care Commission, Compass House, Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY, telephone 0845 603 0890.

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