



**Lathallan School
Johnshaven
19 January 2010**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspects schools in order to let parents¹, young people 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 young people are involved. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the school 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. 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.

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

Lathallan School is an independent school with a nursery class. The school accepts children from birth to S5 and includes the nursery class, pre-preparatory and preparatory schools and senior school. Pupils come from a wide area of the north east of Scotland. The school's secondary department was set up in 2006. Young people in the current S5 were the first to be presented for national examinations, at S4, in 2009. The roll was 226, including 76 in the nursery when the inspection was carried out in November 2009. The inspection also included the residential accommodation. The roll in the boarding house is ten.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Children's experiences and the engagement of staff in supporting children's learning in the nursery.
- Enthusiastic, caring and confident children and young people, and their contribution to the school community.
- Achievements of children and young people in a wide range of areas across the school and beyond.
- High quality pastoral care and the hard work of staff to meet young people's individual needs.
- The strong start made by the headmaster to improving the school through self-evaluation.

3. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In the nursery class, children enjoy a range of interesting play experiences in the playroom and outdoors. They are enthusiastic and keen to choose activities. Throughout the school, almost all young people are highly motivated. A number, particularly in the senior school, are becoming involved in deciding what and how they learn. Almost all are hard working and respond very well to their teachers' enthusiasm for learning. This active approach to learning is not yet consistent at all stages or in all departments. In a number of classes, young people would benefit from clearer statements of what they are expected to learn, and more feedback on what they need to do to improve. This would enable them to develop more independence in their learning. Across the school, young people enjoy taking part in the

school's wide range of activities and clubs. Almost all children and young people feel valued, respected and well cared for as individuals by staff and each other.

Children in the nursery class are confidently developing new skills. They are particularly adventurous when playing outdoors. They are increasingly learning to share and take turns in games and activities. They are confident of their ability to succeed. In the preparatory schools, children exercise responsibility by being eco-monitors. By the senior school, young people successfully take on roles of significant responsibility such as representing the views of their fellow pupils in the school Senate. Across the whole school, young people increase their confidence and develop a range of personal and social skills by taking part in many sporting, musical and cultural activities. For example, over a third of children and young people across the school participate in the school's successful pipe band. Their dedication to performing well is exemplary. Almost all young people in S4/5 have achieved a Duke of Edinburgh award. At S2, young people achieve certification in national navigation awards through outdoor education. Young people in the senior school show clear commitment to community service through their wide ranging programme of service to others. At all stages, children and young people work together effectively to put on high quality concerts and dramatic productions.

Children in the nursery class are making very good progress in their learning and development. They talk confidently to adults and are beginning to share ideas when playing together in groups. They enjoy books and story telling. Most children can count to ten and beyond, and can recognise numbers. Many use mathematical language accurately in their play. In the preparatory schools, almost all children are attaining appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Many achieve these levels earlier than might be expected. Almost all children and young people have well-developed skills in talking and listening. A few could listen more closely to others in group discussions. Children have a well-developed understanding of science and sustainability issues. Across the whole school, young people speak French confidently with a good accent. In the senior

school, young people are achieving very well in most subject areas. In the school's first year of national examinations, young people were particularly successful in English and mathematics. Almost all young people are making very good progress from their previous levels of attainment.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school's curriculum offers very good opportunities for young people to develop their individual talents and qualities and prepares them well for life beyond school. Staff in the nursery provide a good range of activities based on children's interests. Children's learning is enhanced by high quality experiences in outdoor education and French. In the preparatory schools, teachers are developing aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence* to supplement the Common Entrance curriculum. Children study a suitably wide range of topics and courses which help them make progress in their learning. They benefit from specialist teaching in many subject areas. They do not yet have enough opportunities to make choices in their learning. Planned activities to help children and young people develop their skills in citizenship, enterprise and sustainability are very good. In the senior school, young people follow a broad curriculum which caters for individual needs and allows young people a good measure of choice. It has a clear rationale and has been developed in consultation with staff, parents and young people. Staff regularly review and adapt curriculum choices to meet the needs of each young person. The curriculum is further enriched by a wide variety of residential experiences, including international visits. The school offers a well-coordinated range of opportunities for personal achievement, including in the evenings and at weekends. Children and young people benefit from an excellent choice of musical and sporting activities.

In the nursery, staff set activities at the right level of difficulty for most children. A few children would benefit from even more challenge. Staff identify children's additional learning needs at an early stage and take action to help them make suitable progress. Staff help children

become confident and successful in their learning. Across the whole school, most teachers take account of individual needs in setting tasks and activities in classes. In many lessons, particularly in the senior school, young people learn at a rate which motivates and challenges them. Occasionally, however, teachers need to be more flexible in adapting activities to suit each young person. Staff at all stages recognise the need to review and improve ways of ensuring that the tasks set in classes meet the learning needs of all children and young people. Overall, there is a need for learning support staff within the preparatory schools and the senior school to work much more closely together to ensure better consistency in the support provided to both young people and staff. This will help all staff to take full responsibility for young people with additional support needs and meet their needs appropriately. In the boarding house, staff support young people effectively and sensitively in their learning.

4. How well do staff work with others to support the learning of children and young people?

Nursery staff have developed strong, positive relationships with parents, local organisations and Aberdeenshire Council to enhance children's learning. Parents work alongside nursery staff to help with French and topic work. Visitors regularly enrich children's learning. Across the school and boarding house, staff have created strong and supportive partnerships with parents and members of the local and wider community to support children and young people. Local police and other professionals contribute effectively to young people's personal and social development. The school keeps parents well informed about its work through frequent informal meetings, informative newsletters, open days and helpful written reports on their child's progress and achievement. Staff in the boarding house communicate regularly and effectively with parents. Young people develop their appreciation of the needs of others by visiting residents in care homes, working on a range of projects and organising fundraising events for charity. The school keeps parents well informed about its work through frequent informal meetings, informative

newsletters, open days and two helpful annual written reports on their child's progress and achievement. A few parents would like more information about how to help their child with homework. Children and young people are helping improve the local environment by participating in a range of recycling, gardening and ecological 'clean-up' projects. The few complaints the school receives are dealt with effectively.

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

The school has gathered the views of children and young people, parents and staff through discussions and surveys. In the preparatory schools, children take their responsibilities seriously and make their views known through the pupil council and eco-committee. In the senior school, the recently formed Senate is beginning to enable pupils to effect improvements to aspects of school life. The school should now build on this good practice to enable young people to become more involved in decisions about how to improve learning. Staff are highly committed to the values of the school and to the wider personal and social development of young people. They are developing an active involvement in evaluating the work of the school and in setting priorities for improvement. The school has recently introduced a range of suitable procedures for reviewing and improving its work systematically. Staff increasingly work together to reflect on and improve the quality of their work. House staff reflect on the work of the boarding houses effectively, and plan for improvement. These steps have resulted in improvement in young people's learning experiences and curricular choices, particularly in the senior school. Staff's monitoring and tracking of the progress of children and young people is not yet fully effective. Staff now need to find more ways of identifying and sharing good practice with a view to ensuring a consistently high quality of learning and teaching across the school.

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

The nursery and school set high but realistic expectations of what young people can achieve. Teachers use praise well in classes to motivate children and celebrate their many successes. The school has a strong ethos of participation and achievement and sets high expectations of success in everything young people do. There is a very strong emphasis on respect and care for others. Relationships across the school are positive overall, and young people's behaviour is very good. Young people and staff are proud of the school and eagerly celebrate each other's successes. All make a positive contribution to the school community and take an active part in the wide range of activities on offer. Staff have a clear understanding of their role in child protection. Young people are supported very well if they need help with any personal issues. The school contributes well to developing young people's understanding of the importance of exercise in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. There is scope to develop their understanding of healthy eating. In setting up the science labs, staff need to ensure that all appropriate safety advice is followed. The school has good arrangements to support young people when they first arrive at the nursery or school and at their boarding houses. The help that young people give to others across the age range in the school and boarding house is a strong and effective feature of support. This results in well rounded, sociable young people who feel included in the life of the school.

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

The school's vision, based on a strong sense of values aimed at ensuring the all-round development of each individual, is at the heart of all that it does. The board of governors works closely with the headmaster to help ensure that the school's values permeate all aspects of life at Lathallan. In his short time in post, the headmaster has made a very good start to developing leadership and has improved the school's approaches to identifying its strengths and

aspects for improvement. He has gained the loyalty and respect of staff, parents, board of governors and young people. The headmaster, supported by his senior team, has guided staff to a better understanding of the use of information to improve learning and teaching. The leadership of young people could be extended to help support the improvement of teaching and learning.

With continued strong leadership, the school is well placed to continue to improve the quality of education it provides for all its children and young people.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that with the support of the board of governors, 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 board of governors 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 board of governors.

Agreed areas for improvement

- Continue to develop approaches to self-evaluation, including monitoring and tracking pupils' progress.
- Build on the existing good practice in learning and teaching to improve consistency across all areas of the school.
- Enable children and young people to become more involved in decisions about learning.
- Ensure that all health and safety requirements are addressed in the science department.

There were two recommendations from the last singleton inspection of the nursery by the Care Commission, both have satisfactorily been met.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, 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*.

Here are the evaluations for Lathallan School and Nursery Class

School

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

Nursery class

Improvements in performance	good
Children's experiences	very good
Meeting learning needs	good

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

The curriculum	very good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: Anne McGachey
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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