



**Ullapool High School
The Highland Council
1 December 2009**

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) 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

Ullapool High School is a non-denominational school which serves the village of Ullapool and the surrounding rural area. The roll was 250 when the inspection was carried out in September and October 2009. Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Young people's attainment and achievement.
- Well-behaved and motivated young people and their positive relationships with staff.
- The care shown by staff to meet the needs of all young people.
- Strong partnership with the supportive community.

3. Examples of good practice

- Homecoming (*Tillidh Mi Dhachaidh*).
- Awareness of healthy relationships for vulnerable young people.

4. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are well motivated to learn. They engage well with tasks and show a positive attitude to their learning. Young people work well with each other and make helpful contributions during discussions. Relationships between teachers and young people are very positive. Most young people feel that the school is helping them to become more confident and encourages them successfully to make healthy choices. Young people are not always aware of what they need to do to improve their learning. In some lessons young people reflect well on their learning.

They would benefit from having more chances to evaluate their own work and set targets for improvement.

Across all stages, young people benefit from participating in a wide range of activities to help them develop skills and confidence. Almost all young people at S1 work well with children at P7 as part of the school's Highland Literacy Project. At S2, young people learn successfully about food hygiene. Young people at S3, including those with additional support needs, develop important team-working skills by taking part in a work experience placement. At S5/S6, young people develop important skills by caring for and supporting their younger peers. A large number of young people contribute effectively to the community, for example, by organising regular activities to support various charities. Many young people worked well with members of the community in successful cultural events as part of the Homecoming Scotland celebrations.

At S1/S2, most young people achieve appropriate standards in writing and mathematics. Attainment in reading has improved steadily over the last three years and most young people now achieve well. Of the small numbers who take Gaelic, most achieve appropriate standards. Young people's attainment at S4 is well above the national average. It is much better than in schools serving young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Young people receiving additional support or at risk of missing out make sound progress. By the end of S6, young people's attainment is well above national averages. Results are much better than in schools which serve young people with similar needs and backgrounds. Almost all young people leave school to continue their education or to go into employment. The rate of exclusion from school is much lower than the national average.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school provides young people with a broad range of well-planned activities and courses. In a few subjects, staff build successfully on young people's prior learning at primary school. Young people are given good chances to develop their interpersonal, enterprise and

citizenship skills. At S1, all young people recently participated successfully in a food challenge and in forensic science investigations. At S2, young people have good opportunities to work together and to develop skills in outdoor activities during a residential Outward Bound course. At S5/S6, young people are encouraged to learn about rural skills and to develop coaching skills. Staff are beginning to provide young people with good opportunities to link their learning across different areas of the curriculum. At some stages, the school does not provide young people with enough high quality physical education and religious and moral education.

In most classes, teachers set young people tasks at the right level of difficulty. In almost all lessons, teachers explain work well and give young people clear instructions. Most make good use of questions to check that young people understand the work. Support for learning staff are very effective at identifying young people's needs. They share information well with teachers to meet the needs of individual learners. Support staff, including learning support assistants, work skilfully with young people with additional support needs. Throughout the school, teachers know young people very well. Staff with pastoral care responsibilities give very effective support and advice. Young people with individualised educational programmes are given well-planned and effective support.

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

Staff work very effectively with others to support young people's learning. The school's wide range of partner agencies provides very strong support. These agencies include the children's services worker, youth development officer, educational psychologist and various health professionals. Partnerships with parents are positive. Almost all are happy with the school and are very satisfied about how the school keeps them informed about their children's progress. The Parent Council has been successful in helping staff to consult with parents, particularly in more remote rural areas. The school works

very well with a wide range of partners in the community. Local businesses provide helpful support and advice. They contribute very well to the school's work experience programme for young people and in helping them to prepare for interviews.

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

Staff and young people work well to improve the school community. Young people successfully raise awareness of environmental issues and encourage recycling. Many contribute effectively to the pupil councils which have reviewed the homework policy and dress code. Young people at S5/S6 provide helpful support in classes and around the school, for example by organising successful social events. Most staff improve the school through their work on one or more of the many working groups. The school consults young people, parents and staff regularly. Staff are beginning to share good practice by discussing young people's learning more often. Although senior managers and principal teachers monitor young people's progress and attainment, they do not consistently check the quality of their learning experiences in classes. Arrangements for identifying strengths and weaknesses in learning vary too much. In some classes, young people are encouraged successfully to reflect on how well they are learning. Staff should build on existing good practice to improve the consistency of learning and teaching across the school.

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

The school has a very positive ethos. Almost all young people feel that their teachers encourage them to do well and to achieve widely. Young people are treated fairly and with respect. They feel safe in school and know that staff will deal well with any concerns which they may have. Behaviour across the school is very positive. Young people and staff work very well together. Almost all staff have high expectations for young people's achievement. Staff acknowledge and

celebrate young people's achievements well at assemblies, in newsletters and in displays throughout the school. Staff are aware of child protection procedures. They deal appropriately with any concerns or complaints received from parents or members of the community.

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

The school has a very strong ethos of success and achievement. It is well led by its very experienced headteacher. He has a clear vision for the school and its community and is highly respected by parents, young people and staff. He has worked very effectively with senior managers to maintain high standards of attainment and achievement. Together, they have improved the school in many important areas. Staff feel well supported and have very positive relationships with almost all young people. Staff and young people have good opportunities to take responsibility and many do so successfully. Parents and members of the wider community provide strong support. Senior managers should develop more effective links with departments to improve the consistency of young people's learning and achievements.

9. What happens next?

We are confident that 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.

- Develop better approaches to monitoring and evaluating young people's learning and achievements.
- Involve young people more consistently in reviewing their learning.
- Continue to improve aspects of the curriculum in line with national guidelines and advice.

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 Ullapool High School.

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

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

HM Inspector: Alistair Brown
1 December 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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