



**Stromness Academy
Orkney Islands Council
19 April 2011**

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 there will also be 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

Stromness Academy is a non-denominational school which serves the West Mainland of Orkney. The roll was 409 when the inspection was carried out in February and March 2011. Young people's attendance was above the national average in 2009/2010.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- High standards of behaviour shown by young people and their positive relationships with staff.
- The wide range of partnerships which effectively support young people's learning, achievement and wellbeing.
- Standards of pastoral care for young people.
- The strong lead taken by the headteacher in bringing about improvements in the school.

3. How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Almost all young people are well behaved in class and keen to learn. They respond well to a range of activities and enjoy their lessons and other learning experiences. They have positive relationships with staff and feel safe and cared for in the school. Overall, young people are active in their learning. They ask appropriate questions in class to develop their understanding and to help each other. In some subjects, they carry out research projects where they are developing their skills as independent learners. Young people also comment on each others' work in some classes. They have been consulted on the content of a few courses and this has led to improvements. Staff need to be more consistent in making sure that young people in school understand what they are learning and, why and how, they can improve.

Young people achieve highly through a range of activities and are developing confidence and the ability to work with others. A few are developing leadership skills through taking responsibility for activities such as, in music, and through the S5 and S6 leadership course. Many young people continue to develop their skills through voluntary participation in sports. The school's partnership with Voluntary Action Orkney provides young people with the opportunity to gain

accreditation for their voluntary work. The established programme of imaginative Friday afternoon activities gives young people a variety of achievements. The chartered school librarian is working closely with the Community Learning and Development provider to deliver Youth Achievement Awards to a small group of young people in S3 to S5. Many achievements for young people relate to gaining knowledge and practical skills around the history and culture of the local area, and Orkney as a whole. For example, Historic Scotland in conjunction with Orkney College gives young people in S1 taster sessions in traditional heritage skills.

Young people are making good progress in their learning in S1/S2. Staff do not yet take full account of what young people have learned in primary school to challenge them appropriately, but this is improving. Young people's progress in aspects of literacy needs to be more consistent across the school. Achievement in numeracy across all aspects of young people's learning, is not yet well developed. Examination results at S4 to S6 are better than national averages on almost all measures. In most aspects, results are better than those of schools where young people have similar needs and backgrounds. Results at the end of S6 are particularly strong. Overall, subject departments perform well. A few, such as music and physical education, have been improving. However, there has been a decline in whole-school attainment at Credit level in S4.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Young people have access to a wide range of courses and activities, particularly at Advanced Higher level. The school has implemented Curriculum for Excellence well at S1. It has developed a number of projects which link learning across subject areas. The *Safer Islander Initiative* and the *Healthy Me* project, as well as the planned programme for personal and social development, have broadened young people's experiences of learning. The school is working to develop greater personalisation and choice in the curriculum, especially from S3 to S6. It plans to build on the strong links it has with Orkney College where many young people undertake a range of

vocational courses including maritime studies. More work is needed to make sure that staff plan learning activities more consistently in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. The school is building on the very positive start made by some departments who are promoting literacy and health and wellbeing. The school does not provide two hours of quality physical education from S3 onwards. It has good pastoral links with its associated primary schools and is continuing to strengthen curricular links to ensure continuity and progression in young peoples' learning. Arrangements to support young people in moving to positive destinations after leaving school are very well organised and successful.

Teachers and specialist staff know young people well and work together closely to support them and meet their needs. Across the school, there are many examples of teachers working very well to support young people's learning. However, there is a need for all teachers to use a wider range of teaching approaches to help young people learn better. They need to use real-life and relevant contexts for learning more often. In too many lessons, the pace of learning is slow for many young people, particularly the most able, and tasks are not challenging enough. Pastoral care and support for learning staff work successfully with parents, staff, primary teachers and partners in planning to meet the additional support needs of pupils. They provide helpful information to staff and share this promptly with a range of agencies. This allows effective planning and early support, particularly for more vulnerable pupils.

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

Parents are generally positive about the school and the standard of education it provides. Almost all feel that their children enjoy the school and are making good progress. The school keeps them well informed through attractive newsletters and leaflets. These explain developments in Curriculum for Excellence, and how parents can support their children. For many aspects of its work, such as transition, the school seeks the views of parents and acts on them.

However, the school should develop the engagement of parents in improving the school. The school needs to improve the information it gives to parents on their children's progress. The Parent Council actively supports the school by participating in working groups and through fundraising. However, it needs to have a more systematic role in collecting the views of parents on the school's work.

The school serves an exceptionally active and vibrant community and levels of volunteering and community activity are very high. Very positive and effective working relationships are now in place with a wide range of community partners which support young people's learning, wellbeing and achievement. The school's Home School Support Officer and its support assistants, have provided well measured, targeted support which young people have found beneficial. The school's partnership with Skills Development Scotland ensures that effective links are in place with employers, businesses, local community, voluntary sectors and further education centres to support young people for their lives after they leave school.

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

Most staff are involved in working groups to improve the school. Almost all are committed to reflecting on their own practice and improving it. Emerging developments in working to develop literacy across the curriculum, and to share good practice, have been very positive. Formal systems to monitor and improve the work of the school, such as examination results, are now in place and are having a positive impact. The pupil council discusses aspects of the school, including the standards and quality report, but has not had an impact in school improvement. Overall, young people do not yet have enough of a say in how the school, and their own learning, can improve.

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

Staff and young people share high expectations for standards of behaviour and achievement. Young people respond appropriately.

The school actively values and promotes the achievements of young people through a broad range of cultural, musical and sporting activities. Staff celebrate the success of groups and individuals very well through newsletters, notice boards and at assemblies. Levels of pastoral care, and the promotion of health and wellbeing, are very high. Staff now need to ensure that they have consistently high expectations for what all young people can achieve in classes. The school has appropriate procedures for child protection. The school promotes equality and diversity effectively through personal and social education, other subject areas, and in assemblies. There are appropriate arrangements for religious observance.

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

Since taking up post, the headteacher has taken a very strong lead in improving the school. She has established clear systems for monitoring the school's work, and has made a positive start to implementing Curriculum for Excellence. The depute headteachers and business manager are effective overall in giving support and challenge to their link departments, and in carrying out their other duties. Most principal teachers are effective in improving the quality of learning in their subjects. To date, the headteacher has carried most of the responsibility for the strategic direction of the school to ensure improvements. In order for the school to continue to improve and fully implement Curriculum for Excellence, leadership now needs to be developed and shared. The depute headteachers and principal teachers need to accept more strategic responsibilities for leading 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.

- Ensure that the needs of learners are better met by all staff.
- Continue to implement Curriculum for Excellence to improve learners' experiences and achievement.
- Improve approaches to leadership so that staff carry out appropriate roles in leading learning and school improvements, and that parents and young people are consulted fully.

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 Stromness Academy.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Improvements in performance | good |
| Learners' experiences | good |
| Meeting learning needs | satisfactory |

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

| | |
|--|-------------|
| The curriculum | good |
| Improvement through self-evaluation | good |

HM Inspector: Brian Stewart
19 April 2011

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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