



**Port Elphinstone School
and Nursery Class
Inverurie
Aberdeenshire Council
3 November 2009**

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

Port Elphinstone School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class. It serves an area to the south of Inverurie. The roll was 85, including 13 in the nursery class when the inspection was carried out in August and September 2009. Children's attendance was above the national average in 2007/2008. In the last year, there had been four acting headteachers in post. The school now has two permanent job-sharing headteachers, one of whom had recently been appointed.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Polite, well-behaved children who are keen to learn.
- The caring, supportive and positive ethos.
- The increasing range of active learning experiences, particularly at the early stages of the primary classes.
- Children's attainment in mathematics, including their skills in problem solving and enquiry.
- Children's skills and wide-ranging experiences in physical education across the primary classes.

3. Example of good practice

- Home-school learning challenges in the early years.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Children in the nursery class are making satisfactory progress in their learning and development. They are beginning to take turns during group activities. Most play well together, particularly in the house corner. Across the primary classes, children are highly motivated and keen to learn. They are now using information and communications technology to enhance their learning. Children are beginning to be more actively involved in their learning, especially at the early stages.

However, they do not always know their strengths as learners or what they need to do to improve.

In the nursery class, children understand the importance of keeping healthy by taking care of their teeth and washing their hands regularly. Through their topic about the sea, children are gaining knowledge of the natural world and can name a few fish and sea creatures. In the primary classes, children achieve success and are developing very good skills in a wide range of physical education activities, including rugby and hockey. They perform and present well in music at the bi-annual school show and community concerts. A residential experience for children at P6 and P7 successfully develops their personal and social skills and gives them the opportunity to work as part of a team. Children have a good knowledge of Scottish culture. For example, they learned about Scottish dancing and poetry and designed tartan in the lead up to a 'Homecoming 2009' celebration.

In the nursery class, the majority of children talk well with each other and adults about their chosen activities. Children are beginning to make marks and explore early writing while in role-play situations. In early mathematics, most children can confidently match and sort small objects. They can recognise and use numbers up to five. In the primary classes, children are making good progress in listening, talking, reading, writing and very good progress in mathematics. The school has maintained high standards in English language and mathematics over the past three years. Most children listen well and respond appropriately to instructions. They readily give their views and opinions. Most children enjoy reading and use the library regularly. Most children write for a range of purposes but do not always write at sufficient length. They have a good knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation and are beginning to use this in their writing. In mathematics, most children are confident in making written calculations involving number, money and measurement. Their skills in mental calculation are not yet quick enough. Children display a good knowledge of the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They organise and present information well

using graphs and charts. They are very confident when describing how to solve problems and use a range of strategies very well.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The school is at the early stages of developing the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*. In the nursery class, staff are beginning to involve children in planning play-based activities and experiences. They should continue to extend the use of the outdoor areas for learning. Staff plan a good range of early science activities such as floating and sinking. They should build on this work to plan more opportunities for children to investigate and develop independence across other areas of their learning. Across the primary stages, staff provide children with a good range of activities across the curriculum. In taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*, they should plan opportunities to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills across learning. Staff ensure that children's learning is enhanced by a range of outings and visitors to the school. They provide children with a good range of opportunities to learn about the world of work through enterprise activities. All classes receive at least two hours of good quality physical education per week.

In the nursery class, staff know children well and are beginning to match activities and resources to the needs of individual children. They plan support for children who need additional help with their learning. Staff need to improve their interactions with children and use their observations of children's experiences to plan what they will learn next. Across the primary stages, staff meet the learning needs of the majority of children well. However, planned classwork does not always take enough account of the different learning needs of all children. At times, activities are not appropriate for higher-achieving children. All children are not yet aware of targets for improving their own learning, particularly in writing. Staff create a positive environment for learning and share the purpose of lessons with children. They give clear explanations and instructions and use praise well to support children's learning. They do not always use questions well enough to extend and challenge children's thinking. The school

has identified the need to update procedures for supporting learning. Children who are experiencing difficulty with aspects of their learning make good progress overall. Staff now need to involve children and their parents fully in regularly reviewing support plans. Support assistants work effectively with children to help them with their learning. The support for learning team needs to work more closely to plan children's learning experiences. Homework activities are regular and in the early stages home-school challenges are exciting and enjoyable.

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

Across the school, staff work well with partner agencies to support children and their families. The Parent Council is very supportive of the school. Parents successfully raise funds to support children's learning. They receive helpful newsletters and an annual progress report about their child's learning. The school consults parents on sensitive health issues and is good at dealing with any concerns. Staff should continue to extend parental involvement in the life and work of the nursery class. The school has a few links with the community which are used well to enhance children's learning. Staff should continue to work with partners to extend opportunities for out-of-class learning. Well-planned arrangements are in place for children entering P1 and for those transferring to Inverurie Academy.

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

The school asks parents and children for their views on how to improve the school. Through the pupil council, children have a say in improving areas such as the playground. Children are enthusiastic helpers in the school. By P7, they successfully take on a range of responsibilities which help build confidence and develop leadership skills. For example, young leaders help children to play well together

at break times. The headteachers and staff are committed to improving the school. They should now increase the pace of improvement by sharing good practice and work together to improve the curriculum and children's experiences. Staff do not always make the best use of information about children's progress to improve the quality of learning and the ways in which children's needs are met.

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

Staff create a warm, caring and supportive ethos in the school. Relationships between children and staff are positive. Children are polite and very well behaved. Almost all school staff are aware of, and confident in their responsibilities for keeping children safe. Staff know children well and ensure that they are treated equally and with respect. They now need to have higher expectations of what children can achieve and give them greater responsibility for their own learning. There are good opportunities for religious observance. Staff should continue to develop equality and diversity across the curriculum. The nursery door needs to be more secure to reduce the risk of children leaving the building unaccompanied. A few health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the headteachers and the education authority.

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

The headteachers have identified the need to provide a clear sense of direction by updating the school's vision, aims and values. They have established very positive relationships with staff, parents and children. They need to build on this and provide clearer direction on improving learning. Staff have started to improve learning and teaching, for example by planning more active learning for children. With support from the education authority, and under the leadership of the headteachers, the school has the capacity to improve further.

9. 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.

- Improve children's learning experiences in the nursery class.
- Continue to give children more responsibility for their own learning.
- Provide children with appropriate levels of challenge and support to meet their needs more effectively.
- Make better use of information about children's progress and develop further approaches to improving the school.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no requirements or recommendations.

Requirement from this inspection

The provider should take appropriate action to ensure children cannot leave the premises unaccompanied. This is in order to comply with Scottish Statutory Instrument 2002/114 Regulation 10(2) (a).

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 Port Elphinstone School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

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

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: Graeme Logan
3 November 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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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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