



**Carronhill School  
And Nursery Class  
Stonehaven  
Aberdeenshire Council  
10 March 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school<sup>1</sup>. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents<sup>2</sup> and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘school’ is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

<sup>2</sup> 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**

Carronhill School is a special school with a nursery class which serves an area of South Aberdeenshire. It provides education for children and young people from three to 18 years of age with additional support needs of a complex nature including autism spectrum disorders. When the inspection was carried out in January 2009, the roll was 27, including six children in the nursery. Pupils' attendance was above the national average in 2006/2007.

## **2. Particular strengths of the school**

- Children and young people's learning experiences.
- Attainment and achievement at the secondary stages.
- Positive relationships among staff and children and young people.
- The supportive partnership with parent groups.

## **3. Example of good practice**

- Children's experiences in the hydrotherapy pool and with the visiting musician.

## **4. How well do children learn and achieve?**

### **Learning and achievement**

In the nursery classes, children learn well through a very wide range of activities and experiences. They enjoy their learning very much and show interest and enthusiasm for the activities which staff provide. They are making good progress. In the primary classes, most children are interested in their activities. They communicate effectively through using voice, gesture and through facial expressions. A few are using pictures and symbols well to support their communication. In some lessons, children are not actively involved enough in their learning. Children enjoy their experience of sound and light when using the hydrotherapy pool. They respond with great enthusiasm to opportunities for making music provided by the visiting musician. They

are making progress with numeracy and can match colours, sort objects and count within ten. At all stages in the school, children and young people engage in a wide range of learning experiences in and outside their classrooms. Such activities include horse riding, residential experiences and learning about birds when visiting Dunottar Forest. Children and young people were benefitting from a good range of physical activities such as jogging and swimming. Some children and young people do not use a wide enough range of approaches to communication. At the secondary stages, young people were learning about the past in social subjects. They were developing skills in counting and measuring in enterprise activities and in home economics lessons. Young people are learning to take responsibility, for example when raising funds for a number of charities through enterprise activities. Some young people are involved successfully in the Eco council. At primary and secondary stages, some children and young people benefit from attending other schools and colleges for part of the week.

Most young people are making good progress in working towards learning targets in their individualised educational programmes (IEPs). However, long-term targets are not always set at the right level or matched to activities and tasks in lessons. Some targets are too specific and do not give children and young people enough challenge. At primary stages, most children are making good progress and are achieving well in the Caledonian Award. In recent years, the school has improved attainment at the senior stages. Young people perform well and attain very successfully in a good range of national qualifications (NQ) units at Access levels 1 and courses and units at Access level 2. All young people have gained course awards in managing environmental resources and computing. Most attain a group award at Access level 2. A few young people attain good awards in subjects such as social and vocational studies at Mackie Academy. Across the school, children and young people are making good progress in understanding how to be healthy. Staff have improved aspects of children's and young people's achievement, overall.

## Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The curriculum in the nursery is focused on active learning and on developing children's confidence and their achievements. Children have good opportunities to exercise choice in learning. Children benefit from the good arrangements for starting the nursery and moving into the primary class. The school is well-prepared for developing aspects of the national initiative *Curriculum for Excellence*. For instance, staff offer a wide range of learning experiences many of which are enjoyable and challenging. Staff use the local community well to provide children and young people with interesting experiences which help them to learn. The curriculum is broad and in the secondary stages young people are able to study some subjects in depth. Across the school, some children and young people had too few opportunities to develop successfully their skills in communication. At the later stages of secondary, the curriculum meets the needs of learners very successfully through the range of appropriate NQ courses and units and school, work and college placements.

Teachers identify children's and young people's needs well. Along with support staff, they meet these needs well. In the nursery, staff know children as individuals and most tasks and activities meet children's needs. A few activities were not challenging enough for some children. Across the school, children and young people find the tasks and activities motivating. Staff match tasks and activities well to their needs. Most children and young people achieve their short-term targets in language and communication, understanding and relating to the environment and personal and social education in their IEPs. Children and young people with more complex needs were well supported by good coordinated support plans (CSPs). Young people shared good understanding of their progress when putting together their personal statement in the yearbook. The yearbook effectively recorded aspects of young people's achievements and progress. Staff could use the personal statements more effectively to develop pupils' personal and social skills. Children and young people could be encouraged to do more activities at home to support their learning.

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

Children and young people receive good support from other staff such as speech and language therapists and social work services staff. Staff in the school do not always effectively meet the communication needs of young people with autism spectrum disorders. The Parent Council and the Friends of Carronhill are actively involved in the life of the school and have made positive contributions to improving the environment for learning. This included buying sound and light equipment for the hydrotherapy pool and the sensory room. Almost all parents think that staff really know their children as individuals. Parents are well involved in reviews and receive some helpful information through home-school diaries and very good progress reports on their children's learning. Staff should ensure that they give appropriate attention to dignity and respect in all aspects of their work with children, young people and their families. Staff work well with a number of other schools and colleges to help children achieve success in their learning. They do not yet work well with other nursery schools. The school has effective arrangements to gather parents' views and to deal with complaints.

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

Pupils on the Eco council have been successful in contributing to suggestions to bring about some improvements to the school grounds. However, the school does not yet have a pupil council. Staff are highly committed to pupils' care and welfare and are successful in creating a supportive environment. Staff morale is high in Carronhill School and staff are reflective about their work. Teachers regularly discuss young people's progress and make changes to better meet the needs of every single learner. They have just begun to work together to improve learning and teaching. The school improvement plan has had some impact on improving children's attainment and achievements. The school publishes a good standards and quality report with a

shorter version for parents. The parent groups have contributed to school improvement through effective fundraising. However, staff need to share more effectively their work on knowing the strengths and areas for development for the school.

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

Staff and pupils share mutual respect and have good relationships. Children and young people are generally supportive of each other. Staff have good knowledge of child protection and some have had recent training in behaviour management and safe approaches to moving and handling. Staff had not had recent training in aspects of the intimate care of children and young people. The school chaplain knows children and young people well through regular visits and opportunities for religious observance at weekly assemblies. Parents feel very welcome in the school and they attend a number of events in the school. The school successfully helps young people become aware of different religions. Staff and children record and celebrate achievements through their yearbook and awarding certificates. Staff have very high expectations of attendance and although some young people have complex or multiple health or disability factors, they attend school regularly.

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

The headteacher places appropriate importance on providing a wide range of learning experiences for all children and young people. She sets a positive tone to the atmosphere in school and works well with a range of partner groups to improve aspects of the work of the school. The depute headteacher has made good progress in taking forward provision for young people at the secondary stages. Across the school, teachers are now working together to look at how they can improve further teaching and learning. They are looking at ways of sharing good practice in learning and teaching with each other.

Support staff can be better involved in ways to improve teamworking in the school.

## **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 following 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 consistent approaches to improving communication and language across the school.
- Promote the more active involvement of children and young people in their learning.
- Work together as a staff to identify strengths and areas for improvement in learning and teaching and achievement.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no requirements. One recommendation was made regarding the surface of the outdoor play area and was still outstanding at the time of the inspection.

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 Carronhill School and Nursery Class.

### Carronhill School

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>good</b>

### Carronhill School Nursery Class

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Children's experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>good</b>

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

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>good</b>

**HM Inspector:** David Watt  
10 March 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses