



**Whitehills School  
and Nursery Class  
Banff  
Aberdeenshire Council  
23 June 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**

Whitehills School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class. It serves the village of Whitehills and surrounding area. The roll was 108, including 18 in the nursery, when the inspection was carried out in April 2009. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008. The school has experienced frequent changes in leadership over the past few years. The headteacher had recently returned to her post.

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

- Confident, well-behaved and articulate children who work well together.
- The commitment and hard work of the staff team during the absence of the headteacher.
- The positive relationships between almost all staff and children.

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

### **Learning and achievement**

In the nursery class, children are making good progress in their learning. They are well behaved, play happily together and consider others' feelings. Staff are very caring and engage with children to help them become more successful in their play. Children talk to adults confidently and are beginning to share ideas, thoughts and feelings with others. A few take an active part in committee meetings to decide how the nursery will plan developments. Children are developing their writing well through play activities. A few recognise numbers and use these skills when counting out and measuring ingredients for baking cakes. Staff need to develop children's curiosity and problem solving skills and involve them more in planning and thinking about their own learning.

In the primary classes almost all children are keen to take part in their learning. They feel safe and enjoy being in school. In P1 and P2, children's learning is not building sufficiently on their nursery experience. Across the school children are experiencing more opportunities to be active in their learning. This is particularly effective in the upper stages. Children are developing good physical, cultural and social skills, including teamwork, through participating in local

sporting and musical festivals. They are developing life skills through technology, mathematics and science challenges. At all stages, children have some knowledge about the importance of eating healthily and taking regular exercise. By P7, they have developed informed attitudes through regular discussions on world events. In the P4 to P6 class children can introduce themselves confidently in French. Overall, children's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is good. However, their attainment in mathematics has recently declined. Most children achieve appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics. In English language, children in P1 to P3 have not yet learned to listen to one another and interrupt too often. From P4 to P7, children listen attentively to each other's contributions and express their opinions confidently. They are able to read fluently and write well in a range of styles across subjects. In mathematics, the pace of learning in P1/P2 needs to improve. By P4, the majority of children are making good progress in their written number calculations. By P7, children confidently analyse graphs, identify shapes and lines of symmetry. They can explain how they reach their answers and are aware of a range of problem solving strategies. They are less confident at carrying out mental calculations and working with units of measurement. Children would benefit from more practice in solving problems in a variety of everyday situations.

## **Curriculum and meeting learning needs**

In the nursery class, children have a balanced curriculum based appropriately on learning through play. Staff are beginning to respond to children's views and interests and to offer choices when they plan activities. They are developing children's interest in the natural world through planning learning in the outdoor garden. In the primary classes, staff provide children with a broad curriculum. They are at an early stage in providing a curriculum in line with the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. Staff are starting to make more use of approaches, such as competitions and challenges, which encourage children to be active and interested in learning mathematics and science. For example, all children have recently been involved in the *Gi-normous Giraffe* science challenge and 'money week'. Staff now

need to help children to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy across other curricular areas. Visiting specialists and class teachers need to work together more closely to build on children's prior learning. The school has yet to ensure that all children receive two hours of quality physical education each week.

In the nursery class, staff are sensitive to the individual learning needs and personal circumstances of children. They use encouragement, praise and questioning well to help give children the confidence to explore new activities. Staff are skilled in observing children when they play. However, arrangements for using assessment to plan learning, including for children with additional support needs, are not yet effective enough. In the primary classes, staff work well together to provide a high level of support to children with additional support needs and help them make good progress. Teachers know children well but they sometimes set tasks and activities which are not pitched at the right level. Whilst a number of lessons are well paced, challenging and exciting, there are considerable inconsistencies in the quality of children's learning across the school. Most teachers give clear explanations and a few use questioning and feedback skilfully to extend and challenge children's thinking. Teachers now need to provide more opportunities for children to be independent in their learning and help them plan their next steps. Staff involve children helpfully in reflecting on their learning through learning logs.

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

The school has effective links with other schools, agencies and the community council which help to support children's learning. The Parent Council works well with the school to raise money for end-of-term events. The school keeps parents informed through detailed progress reports and parent-teacher meetings. However, many parents think that the school does not take enough account of their views. The school should review its policy for sorting out complaints from parents, children and staff. It needs to do more to

involve parents in their children's learning. The school works well with the local playgroup to help children make a confident move into nursery. Procedures to improve the experience for children moving from nursery into P1 are still being developed. Children are well supported in their move from P7 to Banff Academy.

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

Staff have worked hard together over the past few years to try and bring about school improvement in the absence of a permanent headteacher. Staff and children work together to raise funds for local and national charities. Across the school, children are keen and able to take on responsibilities. The P7 children help younger children as 'buddies', and others across the school take charge of aspects of running the tuck shop. All children would benefit from increased opportunities to exercise responsibility, both in their learning and more widely across the school. Arrangements for using self-evaluation to improve the school and to track and plan children's progress are not effective enough.

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

Across the school, children are friendly and polite to staff and one another. Almost all staff are very committed to supporting the care and wellbeing of children and are effective in carrying out their responsibilities concerning child protection. Staff have high expectations of children's behaviour but their expectations of what children can achieve could be much higher. Children's achievements are celebrated at assemblies and in displays around the school. The local chaplain contributes to assemblies and supports the school's religious observance. The good work done on international education by some staff now needs to be further developed to raise awareness and understanding of other cultures consistently across the school.

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

In the absence of a permanent headteacher, staff have worked hard as a team to improve aspects of children's experiences, and to maintain stability within the school for parents and children. At present, the school lacks a clear, shared sense of direction. All staff, parents and children need to be involved in devising the school's vision, values and aims. Across the school, staff need support and guidance on how to improve their planning and approaches to learning and teaching. The recently returned headteacher needs to develop her knowledge and skills in order to lead school improvement. The school requires significant support from the education authority to develop its capacity to improve.

## **8. What happens next?**

With the support of the education authority 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.

- Improve communication and leadership within the school and put in place more effective approaches to monitor and evaluate its work.
- Strengthen the curriculum in line with the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Improve further learning and teaching to provide children with more opportunities to be challenged and independent in their learning.
- Develop closer partnerships with parents and involve them more in their children's learning.

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

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 Whitehills School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

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

Nursery class

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

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

<b>The curriculum</b>	<b>satisfactory</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>weak</b>

**HM Inspector:** Laura J S Welford  
23 June 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