

# Summarised inspection findings

**Thrumster Primary School**

The Highland Council

21 January 2020

## Key contextual information

Thrumster Primary School lies on the edge of the village of Thrumster, which is located four miles south of Wick. It serves the surrounding rural districts of Clyth, Ulbster, Tannach and Sarclet. At the time of the inspection, there were 33 children in the primary school, taught across two classes. The headteacher has leadership responsibility for both Thrumster Primary School and Watten Primary School. The headteacher is supported by a principal teacher who is based in Thrumster Primary.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

**satisfactory**

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher is highly regarded by staff, parents and partners. She has developed a staff team who work very well together. All staff demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the social, economic and cultural context of the school. They use this knowledge, and a range of effective partnerships, well to inform the work of the school. This effective, collegiate approach demonstrates the shared commitment of all staff to the school and improving outcomes for all children.
- The school's vision, values and aims were developed in partnership with children, staff and parents. The headteacher has plans in place to review these in the near future, with a specific focus to capture better the uniqueness of Thrumster Primary School. The school's curriculum rationale should be reviewed in light of this work, to ensure it delivers the refreshed vision. In taking this forward, the headteacher should take due account of current curriculum guidance.
- All children contribute to school improvement through their involvement in school committees. House captains motivate their house teams and lead by example. The school has rightly identified the need to develop further children's contribution to the leadership of change. Opportunities for children to take greater ownership of leading committees should continue to be developed. Introducing children to guidance, such as *How good is OUR school?* (2018), will support the school to take this forward.
- Distributed leadership across the staff team enables staff to take responsibility for specific areas of development. Staff undertake appropriate professional learning, such as digital leaders' training, to support these roles. In taking these developments forward, staff should ensure effective evaluation is embedded in the improvement process. This will ensure the effectiveness of change on improving outcomes for children is clearly identified.
- The headteacher seeks the views of parents in a variety of ways, including informal feedback and more formal questionnaires. The school's approaches to communication with parents are effective. All parents feel well informed and fully consulted about the work of the school and their child's progress. An active Parent Council supports the school well to enhance children's experiences. Their ability to secure additional funding, through grant applications and

fundraising activities, has seen the installation of a multi-use games area and a 'learning lodge'. Their recent purchase of a new interactive board in the older classroom is enhancing children's learning experiences. The headteacher consults appropriately with the Parent Council in relation to the school improvement plan and use of the Pupil Equity Fund. There is potential to develop further their role in the school improvement planning process.

- The school improvement plan appropriately focuses on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The Pupil Equity Fund is used effectively by staff to provide targeted support for individual children. Staff are gaining confidence in using quality indicators to inform self-evaluation. A quality assurance calendar is in place that enables the headteacher to monitor children's progress on an ongoing basis. To provide greater clarity, the school has taken positive action to streamline approaches to tracking children's progress. The frequency of tracking conversations with teachers has also been increased this session. Despite this, the school's quality assurance approaches are not yet sufficiently robust to ensure consistently high quality learning and teaching. The headteacher needs to now increase the strategic use of data, to look more effectively at progress across the whole school. This will improve the effectiveness of the strategic direction and pace of change.
- Staff benefit from an annual professional review. This supports the identification of appropriate professional learning for staff to meet the needs of individual teachers and the school. Senior leaders ensure time is protected for professional dialogue, collegiate learning, and to support self-evaluation activities. Opportunities for staff to work with cluster colleagues and across the associated schools group supports them to be outward looking. Staff should continue to seek good practice in other schools. Peer learning amongst staff should continue to be encouraged by senior leaders.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff provide a calm, purposeful learning environment in which children feel valued and respected. Children demonstrate mutual respect and standards of behaviour are high. This enables children to engage in learning in a positive and purposeful way. Children are enthusiastic and keen to learn and know who to ask if they need help. All staff know children very well as individuals and use this effectively to support them in their learning.
- Most children understand the purpose of their learning. Almost all children talk confidently about what they are doing. Although children engage well with learning activities, these do not always provide the right level of challenge to ensure sufficient progress. The majority of children feel that their learning is hard enough some of the time. Children have a few opportunities to exercise choice and be independent in their learning. Increased opportunities for children to take greater responsibility to lead learning should be provided by staff.
- Staff provide a range of opportunities to support children to develop the four capacities. For example, through their involvement in cultural, sporting and community events. This supports them to be confident and successful. Leadership roles and responsibilities, such as the care of the school guinea pig, enables children to contribute to the life and work of the school. Almost all children feel listened to and most feel that their views are taken into account by teachers.
- Teaching is underpinned by the school's shared vision and values. The school benefits from spacious grounds, and a local community that provide rich learning opportunities. The school has correctly identified the need to develop further its approach to outdoor learning. This will enable these learning environments to be used more effectively by children and staff to support creative teaching approaches. Teachers use digital technology well to support and extend learning. Older children are making increasing use of technology and are beginning to use this to share their learning with parents. Younger children should be provided with similar opportunities. By staff increasing the range of technologies in use, for a wider range of purposes, children's skills will be enhanced further.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. This supports children to understand what they are learning and what is expected of them. The quality of teachers' questioning is not yet consistently effective. Too often, their questioning does not enable children to use higher order thinking skills. Teachers' promotion of curiosity and independence in all learners will be developed further through their use of more effective questioning and discussion.
- Staff observe children closely, but are not yet consistently using this information to inform accurately interventions and future learning. Learning conversations with teachers support children to reflect on their own progress. Building on this positive start, these conversations should enable children to identify clearly next steps in their learning. By encouraging children to

take greater ownership of these conversations, teachers can increase children's understanding of what they need to do to be successful.

- There are early indications that the implementation of learning and teaching strategies to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy are leading to improved outcomes for children. Professional learning for staff to support these initiatives should continue to be provided. This will ensure staff have a strong, shared pedagogical understanding of what these initiatives are aiming to achieve.
- Staff use a range of summative and standardised assessment approaches to inform children's progress in learning. Children have limited opportunities to self and peer assess. Increased use of formative assessment strategies will provide staff with more timely feedback about children's progress. Standardised assessments are analysed by teachers and used to inform the identification of children's individual strengths and areas for development. These assessments are discussed at regular tracking meetings between the teachers and the headteacher. This is not yet leading to appropriate pace and challenge in learning for all children.
- Staff are beginning to make increasing use of National Benchmarks and recognise that they are the very early stages of the implementation of this guidance. They participate in cluster and associated schools group (ASG) moderation activities. These are beginning to support teachers to develop their understanding of progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels. Assessment is not sufficiently integral to teachers' planning. Key assessment tasks need to be more closely linked to planned learning. Teachers' over-reliance on standardised assessment approaches limits opportunities for children to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in different contexts across the curriculum. Building on the early start made, the headteacher should continue to develop staff's understanding and shared expectations of standards to be achieved.
- Staff use a range of curriculum progression frameworks to inform their planning. This supports effective progression in planned learning in numeracy. However, a lack of consistency in staff's use and application of progression frameworks across all other curricular areas is diminishing their effectiveness. As a result, for a significant number of children, the pace of learning is too slow and not appropriate to their needs.
- Staff use experiences and outcomes to inform planning. The effectiveness of planned learning is not yet evaluated well enough by staff. As a result, next steps for learners are not accurately identified. Greater use of national guidance will support staff to ensure planned learning improves outcomes for all children. Children have limited opportunities to contribute to planning their learning. They are eager to have a greater involvement in this.
- Staff have a range of data available to them against which to track children's progress. Their effective analysis of standardised assessment data is ensuring they identify children who require additional support. It also supports their evaluations of the effectiveness of the targeted interventions they provide for children. Having identified the need to streamline approaches to tracking, the headteacher is currently introducing a new tracking format. This will support the school to increase the pace of children's progress in relation to Curriculum for Excellence levels.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff use a range of progression frameworks to support the delivery of the curriculum. To ensure coherence and progression in learning, these need to be used more consistently by staff across the school. This will support the school to raise attainment and achievement for all. Staff need to place greater emphasis on the progressive development of children's skills for learning, life and work.
- The curriculum is enriched through effective partnership working. For example, through the school's annual participation in a local archaeological dig and the 'Dragon's Den' enterprise project. Staff need to consider how these activities contribute to children's overall curriculum experience. Opportunities for staff to provide effective interdisciplinary learning are being missed. The headteacher should lead the staff team to a shared understanding of what high quality interdisciplinary learning looks like at Thrumster Primary School. By doing so, staff should provide increased opportunities for children to experience breadth, depth and application of learning.
- The school makes use of a range of outdoor learning environments, both within the school grounds and in the wider community. The school recognises the need to develop further children's experiences in this area, particularly at the upper stages. In taking this forward, the headteacher should support staff to review learning contexts. This will support the school to embed outdoor learning and ensure the progressive development of skills.
- Children in upper stages have regular access to digital devices. They use these to research and to present their findings confidently. Older children are supporting younger children to develop core digital skills. The school should further develop progression in digital skills to ensure that activities build on prior learning.
- Teachers make good use of the multi-use games area and the community hall to ensure all children receive two hours physical education a week, in line with national guidance. French is taught across the school. Children in the upper stages learn Gaelic as part of traditional music training.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- All parents feel that the school knows their child very well. They value the individualised approach taken by the school and the positive impact this has on their child's confidence and progress. They feel consulted and involved in matters relating to their child and the school as a whole. They find school staff to be very approachable and methods of communication effective. Any concerns they have are responded to promptly by the school.
- Teachers share children's profiles and key assessment tasks with parents. They have opportunities to share their child's learning. Information sessions, such as e-safety advice, are provided. Parents feel that the school explains clearly approaches to learning that teachers use. Parents are encouraged to contribute to the learning taking place in school. For example, by sharing particular their expertise with regards to their work. Parents of children with additional support needs feel actively involved in the planning and review of support for their child.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- A very strong sense of community is evident across the school. Staff know children and families very well. All staff provide very positive role models, promoting positive, supportive and respectful relationships across the school. As a result, parents and children liken the school's ethos and culture to being that of a 'family'. They feel that they have someone to talk to if they feel worried or upset. Effective partnership working with a range of health agencies supports children and families to overcome barriers to learning.
- Almost all children feel that the school helps them to feel safe. An effective buddy system enables all children to have the support of a peer. Older children encourage and support younger children very well. Parents feel the quality of pastoral care provided for children is very effective. As a result, they have a high level of trust and confidence in the school's ability to meet their child's needs. Children are polite and well mannered. Standards of behaviour are very high. All children feel the school deals with bullying well. Attendance levels are high and there have been no exclusions in recent years.
- Staff have correctly identified the need to develop children's understanding of wellbeing indicators and their rights, in relation to the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of the Child. This forms a key priority within the current school improvement plan. Through a planned assembly programme, class work and wall displays, children are beginning to be introduced to the wellbeing indicators. As planned, the school should build on this positive start and embed a whole school approach for the use of wellbeing indicators. This will support staff to monitor children's wellbeing and better evidence outcomes.
- Teachers use a range of curriculum frameworks to develop children's knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to health and wellbeing. They deliver lessons that promote positive relationships, wellbeing and equality. Children demonstrate confidently the impact of this learning in their day-to-day interactions. Specific aspects of safety, such as cycle and digital safety are also addressed. For example, P7 have gained accreditation for cycle safety. The Pupil Equity Fund has been used by staff to develop children's emotional wellbeing and resilience. This has successfully provided children in the younger class with ideas and strategies that will support them when faced with difficult situations. They are becoming more resilient in their learning. As planned, the school should continue to develop these strategies further with children in the older class. Partnership working with the local community to provide clubs supports children's spiritual and mental wellbeing.
- Almost all children feel that the school teaches them to have a healthy lifestyle. They have regular opportunities to take regular exercise. The installation of a multi-use games area has improved significantly the quality of outdoor physical activity space. This is well used by children and staff for physical education lessons and extra-curricular activities such as football, basketball, shinty and tennis. Children benefit from having free access to the games area, and

the activity trail within the school grounds, out with the school day. Children's participation in the local rural schools swimming gala and triathlons enables them to take part in sporting activities with children in other schools.

- As a result of regular training and guidance, all staff understand and apply the statutory requirements and codes of practice in relation to child protection. The individual needs of children are met well and they are well supported to overcome barriers to learning. Children feel safe and supported as a result.

### **Inclusion and equality**

- The contribution of all children is encouraged and valued by staff. All children are treated with respect. This results in an inclusive approach to children's participation in sporting, cultural and community events. Children gain confidence and self-esteem by participating in these events together. The school identifies barriers to learning and participation and takes action to remove them. For example, effective partnership working with a local community group led to an after-school youth club being established. This removed the need to travel out with their own community, enabling more children to participate.
- The curriculum provides opportunities to learn about different festivals, cultures and religions. Through their participation and leadership of charity events, children are actively involved in learning about others who are less fortunate than they are. This supports them to understand value and respect diversity.

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

#### Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Data provided by the school indicates that most children attain expected Curriculum for Excellence levels across reading, listening, talking and numeracy. The majority of children attain expected levels in writing. Data from a range of standardised assessments is used to inform teachers' judgements about children's progress. These demonstrate that the majority of children make appropriate progress, with a minority making very good progress across literacy and numeracy. Staff are overly reliant on the results of standardised assessments. As a result, teachers' professional judgements in relation to achievement of Curriculum of Excellence levels are not sufficiently robust. The attainment data provided by the school is not yet reliable.
- Staff are beginning to develop a shared understanding of national standards. They have taken part in cluster and ASG moderation activities, with a particular focus on aspects of literacy. Staff recognise that they are at the early stage of ensuring that their professional judgements are robust and reliable. Increased participation in moderation activities, both within the school and with other schools, will support teachers further in this aspect of their work.

#### Literacy and English

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and English is good.
- **Reading:** Overall, children's attainment in reading is good. The school has taken positive action to raise attainment in reading at the middle and upper stages. This is beginning to enable children to read more independently. Most children talk enthusiastically about the books they are reading. They can summarise the key points in stories, make predictions and evaluate the actions of characters. They can explain their reasons for liking the work of particular authors. Most children's fluency in reading is appropriate to their stage. Moving forward, staff should ensure that children are taught a wider range of reading skills and that these are revisited regularly. There is scope to increase the pace of progress in reading for a significant number of children.
- **Writing:** Overall, children's attainment in writing is satisfactory. The school is aware of the need to increase attainment in writing. Staff are beginning to implement training to address this. Children across the school work collaboratively to understand and create texts. For example, younger children use familiar story structures to recount class projects. This approach is beginning to develop their understanding of how to talk about and construct a range of texts. The quality of children's presentation of written work across the school is not consistently good. Systematic teaching of handwriting in the younger class is helping to improve this. The majority of children have improved their spelling skills as a result of the school's successful introduction of a new approach to the teaching of spelling. To raise attainment further, all children need more frequent opportunities to write. They would benefit from increased opportunities to apply and extend their writing skills, across all areas of the curriculum.

- **Listening and talking:** Overall, children's attainment in listening and talking is good. Children listen and talk with confidence in a range of different contexts and for a variety of purposes. Across the school, children listen and talk respectfully to each other, staff and visitors. They speak clearly and audibly and participate well in partner and group work. They contribute to class discussions and tasks appropriately. Children apply listening and talking skills effectively when sharing their news, working together to solve problems and when presenting to a wider audience. The effective use of digital technology is supporting children to share their presentation skills and learning with parents. Moving forward, staff should ensure that talking and listening skills are taught in a planned and progressive way.

## Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, attainment in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory.
- **Number, money, measure:** Children at the early stages use a range of strategies to add within 10 and 20. They are beginning to learn times table facts. This knowledge should now be used to make links with subtraction and division to enable children to solve confidently a range of problems. Older children are financially aware. They can identify the risks and benefits of different ways of paying for goods. They can compare cash with credit card and online banking. Although staff have sought to increase children's mental agility and increase number facts, children lack confidence in using a range of strategies to solve problems. Staff should provide children with increased opportunities to apply their learning in relevant, real-life contexts.
- **Shape, position and movement:** Younger children can apply their knowledge of the features of 2D shapes to create tiling patterns. They understand a single line of symmetry. Older children can correctly identify the properties of 2D shapes and 3D objects using appropriate mathematical language. They can use coordinates effectively to solve problems.
- **Information handling:** Across the school, children can collect, display and interpret data in a variety of ways. For example, they use tally marks, frequency tables and transfer this onto pictographs and bar charts. At the upper stages, children use digital solutions to display data, including graphs and spreadsheets.

## Attainment over time

- Due to the small numbers of children within the school, data cannot accurately define trends in attainment over time. The school uses standardised assessments to identify areas of improvement and have successfully addressed these for individual children. A more streamlined approach to tracking children's progress is being introduced by the headteacher. This should be used by staff to ensure all children make very good progress over time.
- Pupil profiles are beginning to support children to identify their development of skills across the curriculum. Staff should continue to support children to make links between their developing skills and wider achievement. There is potential for profiles to be used more effectively to inform the tracking of individual children's progress over time.

## Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children record their achievements in their profiles. These reflect their wider achievements, both in and out of school. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated by the school community, for example, using the 'Celebrating Success Board'. The school has begun to track children's wider achievements and has identified the need to develop this further, to ensure this contributes to the development of children's skills for learning, life and work.
- All children are provided with a range of opportunities to develop the four capacities through their involvement in sporting, musical and cultural events. For example, the younger class recently planned and delivered a highly successful McMillan coffee morning for the wider

school community. The older class participate annually in an enterprise activity, enabling them to contribute successfully as part of a team.

### **Equity for all learners**

- The Pupil Equity Fund has been used well by staff to provide additional support in literacy and numeracy for targeted individuals. Children with additional barriers to learning are supported well and are making appropriate progress, as a result of these targeted interventions.
- With the support of the Parent Council, the effective use of funding grants ensures all children have equal access to wider achievement opportunities. For example, participation in the P7 residential trip is fully funded for all children.

## Choice of QI: 2.6 Transitions

- Arrangements to support learners and their families
- Collaborative planning and delivery
- Continuity and progression in learning

- All staff know all children very well. This enables them to support children effectively at key points of transition. Parents feel actively involved in the decision-making and planning for transition. This is particularly the case for parents of children with additional support needs. When appropriate, additional support is provided for children who may require it. Partner agencies are appropriately involved throughout transitions. Children and families who join from another school feel very well supported to settle quickly.
- Details of children's progress are shared by staff at key points of transitions. This could be strengthened further, as children transition between the younger and older class. The headteacher's planned improvements to the tracking of children's progress will support this. Further work is needed by staff to ensure that curriculum planning delivers clear progression in learning for all children. Staff across the early learning centre and younger class should work together to develop a shared understanding of progress through the early level.
- The role of nursery support teacher is undertaken by the P1–P4 teacher. This ensures an informed and smooth transition for children as they move into P1. Opportunities are provided by staff in the nursery for older primary aged children to develop relationships with future P1 children, while they are still in nursery. The location of the early learning centre within the school building means children are already familiar with the school environment before starting school. There is potential to increase their involvement with the school further.
- Children participate in a range of planned cluster events. P7 children benefit from a residential experience with peers from other rural schools. This supports them to establish relationships before transitioning to secondary school and become familiar with the secondary school's surroundings. Parents value the personal touches used by staff to celebrate children's transition to secondary. For example, each child receiving a personalised poem and the tradition of children in P7 leaving a gift for the school.

## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.