

# Summarised inspection findings

**Rum Primary School**

The Highland Council

27 June 2023

## Key contextual information

Rum Primary is a small, remote rural school that serves the community of the Isle of Rum, one of the Small Isles of the Inner Hebrides. At the time of the inspection, there were five children on the school roll across the P1, P3, P6 and P7 stages. Children are taught in one mixed-aged, multi-composite class. Following P7, children make the transition to Mallaig High School on the mainland. They stay in the school hostel during the week and return home at weekends.

Following a period of instability in the leadership and staffing of the school in recent years, an experienced headteacher took up permanent post in August 2022. At that time, a new part-time teacher, a new early years practitioner and a new clerical assistant also took up post.

### 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

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

- Over the past few years, because of a range of factors including significant staffing challenges and the pandemic, children's learning experiences have been adversely impacted. The new staff team have worked determinedly to improve the educational offer for the children of Rum. As a result, all children are now fully engaged in their learning and the life of their school. They benefit from very high-quality learning and teaching and have made considerable, accelerated progress across their learning this year.
- Staff have had a clear and highly successful focus on improving children's wellbeing. This included increasing children's ability to regulate their own emotions and behaviours. As a result, the school values of resilience, respect, curiosity and creativity are clearly understood and demonstrated by all children. Staff ensure that the school is a nurturing and caring place, where all children feel safe, respected and trusted. Relationships between children and all staff are extremely positive. Children are very supportive of each other and proud of their collective and individual achievements. They clearly enjoy learning together in the close, family atmosphere and are very polite and kind to one another.
- Teachers plan learning very effectively to provide the right balance of additional support and extra challenge for each child. Children have a very good range of engaging and motivating opportunities to work individually, in pairs and as a whole group. Teachers have supported children particularly well to understand the relevance and purpose of their learning and wider school experiences, since coming together as a new staff team. This includes ensuring that children are highly attuned to their unique island context and what active, responsible citizenship looks like in action. Children help teachers to select exciting contexts and topics and they create interesting questions that they want to explore and research. Children are highly motivated and thoroughly enjoy 'genius hour' each week, when they carry out individual research on a personalised theme. Their learning is often related to the unique context of living on a remote island. This helps to ensure learning is accessible and highly meaningful for all.

- Teachers ensure that outdoor learning is a key feature of the school's curriculum. Staff plan highly effective use of the school grounds, woodlands, shoreline and wider island community to provide children with exciting contexts to learn. Children are highly knowledgeable about their island, and they enjoy sharing their expertise about the history, geography and natural environment. They demonstrate their creativity and enterprising skills by making crafts to sell in the island gift shop. Recently, they have established themselves as enthusiastic tour guides, hosting weekly school parties from other Highland schools who visit for the day. Children apply their leadership and communication skills very confidently in this dynamic and stimulating venture. They lead visiting children confidently on activity trails they have devised around the village and give highly informative talks. They are rightly very proud 'guardians' of the Isle of Rum.
- Staff ensure that an extensive range of visiting professionals to the island are invited into school to share their expertise and skills with children. This adds great value to children's experiences and enriches their learning. It helps them to develop confidence in talking to different adults. Staff's drive to make the most of all potential learning opportunities is very successfully broadening children's horizons about life and the world of work beyond Rum.
- There is clear evidence that the quality of teaching is very good. Over the past year, teachers have worked tirelessly together to embed very effective approaches to planning and assessing learning. They use highly effective approaches to differentiate learning and teaching to meet the varying needs of all children. Children are involved fully in planning their learning and in deciding how they want to go about it. They have regular opportunities to peer and self-assess their work. Children benefit from high-quality individualised feedback from teachers which helps them to improve and identify their next steps.
- Staff benefit from engaging in highly relevant professional learning that focuses on developing aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. This includes high-quality play pedagogy at the early stages to develop spaces and interactions for children to learn. Teachers and early years practitioners ensure that younger children benefit from regular opportunities to learn and play with their friends in the nursery class. They develop their curiosity and creativity very well through playing with loose parts and natural materials in the school grounds. There is a warm, family feel as older children involve and take care of younger ones as they play together.
- Staff have developed very helpful links with teachers in Mallaig High School and Muck and Eigg primary schools. Children benefit by learning alongside new friends from a wider peer group through a series of carefully planned joint-school events. Parents feel that this supports children well for moving on to Mallaig High School and boarding through the week in the school hostel. They are pleased that this year, the opportunities for children to meet with others are increasing.
- The headteacher and staff have developed and implemented a well-judged and proportionate approach to tracking and monitoring children's attainment. They are skilled in using their professional judgement to assess children's progress and use a range of appropriate tests to verify their own assessments. At the beginning of this school year, they identified any gaps in children's learning swiftly and have taken the right steps to address these. Teachers pinpoint accurately where individual children require additional challenge or extra support for them to each make the best possible progress in across their learning.

## 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- 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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

## 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

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

- At the time of the inspection, the school roll comprised children at P1, P3, P6 and P7. Attainment and progress will be expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups or Curriculum for Excellence levels. This is because of the very small numbers of children at each stage.

### Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

- The robust data presented by the school demonstrates that all children made very good progress this year from their prior levels of attainment.
- Overall, children achieve appropriate Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy, relative to their age and stage. A few children exceed national expectations in both literacy and numeracy. For children who require some extra support in their learning, the school's reliable evidence demonstrates that they are attaining well for their individual levels of need. Parents feel that their children are very well supported by staff. They very much appreciate the individual encouragement and attention that their children receive from staff. They value the high-quality information they now receive about their children's progress. They feel strongly that the school's highly effective leadership, and caring and nurturing approach, has helped their children to make much better progress this year.

### Literacy and English Reading

- Children are benefitting from staff's successful efforts to promote a love of reading. They now enjoy reading and make personal choices about what they like to read. They can access freely the well-maintained library area and can choose from a good range of reading materials. Staff actively encourage children to read across a range of genres. Children share their favourite authors and can explain their reasons why. Children are encouraged to link their reading and writing skills by researching their own personal topics during 'genius hour' and producing informative reports to share with their classmates.

### Writing

- Children have regular opportunities to write across a range of genres. A few children demonstrate particular strength in using very sophisticated vocabulary and increasingly complex techniques to improve their writing. They enjoy developing ideas together, for example to describe the main character in a story. Teachers create individualised writing targets to ensure that all children use appropriate punctuation, structure and increasingly complex vocabulary. The headteacher and staff continuously review the resources and stimuli for writing, to ensure these continue to link meaningfully to the school's unique curriculum offer and local context. For example, during a walk in the woods, children stopped to write interesting and creative similes and metaphors about flowers, trees, plants and a waterfall.

- Staff identified that in recent years children had not had enough regular practice in developing their handwriting skills. A more balanced approach to writing is now in place, with a focus on developing children's presentation skills, as well as thoughtful use of technology to enhance literacy learning.

### **Listening and talking**

- Children are highly articulate and have a wide vocabulary. Staff plan interesting and exciting themes and discussion points that motivate children to share their ideas and opinions. All children engage enthusiastically in discussion with visitors about their school, their interests and their learning. Staff patiently support and encourage children to be active listeners and considerate of one another. Children very much enjoy listening to each other's stories and reading to younger children.

### **Numeracy and mathematics**

#### **Number, money and measure**

- Teachers have focused on improving children's mental agility and understanding and application of numerical operations and concepts, such as place value. This has been a very successful strategy in raising attainment in numeracy. Children demonstrate their knowledge about the link between multiplication and division very well, using concrete materials. Teachers plan regular opportunities for children to apply their numeracy skills across their learning. Practical, real-life experiences, such as using ferry timetables, reinforce children's learning about money and time. Teachers plan worthwhile interdisciplinary tasks that enable children to apply their learning in practical mathematics. For example, children measure accurately to find the area and perimeter of the raised beds in their school garden. They can estimate confidently the different lengths using standard units. Staff are helping children to see the relevance of their learning in numeracy and its link to skills for learning, life and work..

### **Shape, position and movement**

- Children have a sound understanding of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They can describe the properties of different types of angles, including acute, obtuse and right angles.

### **Information handling**

- Children sort and display data in a few different ways. They know how to collect information using tally marks and can display their data in graphs and charts. They applied their knowledge by carrying out a survey on how children travel to school each day.

### **Attainment over time**

- Staff have supported children particularly well to make significant, accelerated progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing from their prior levels of attainment. Staff have appropriate plans to make the most of their close working relationships with other schools and to use motivating digital resources to help children remain challenged in their learning.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievement**

- Children develop the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence through a variety of ways, including through their leadership and participation in island events and through worthwhile local partnerships. For example, children demonstrated their knowledge about cooking and local produce when they made haggis for the community Burns Supper, and in making venison burgers for bonfire night. They develop team-working and communication skills by helping adults on Rum Community Council to apply for 'Dark Skies Status', which, children argue convincingly, may help the island's economy.

- This year, children have collaborated with their peers in Eigg, Muck and Mallaig schools to achieve a bronze 'Rights Respecting Schools' award. They are very knowledgeable about their rights and talk positively about how these link closely to their school values.
- As part of outdoor learning and strong partnership working with island environmental groups, children are developing bushcraft skills. Working with specialist instructors, they enjoy developing their awareness of essential survival skills in creating shelters, learning about natural resources and about wilderness cookery. They are working towards accreditation for their skills in this area.
- Children have an impressive general knowledge. They are given space and time to deepen their own knowledge, skills and talents as part of the planned curriculum. For example, they have particular depth of knowledge in scientific and environmental areas of geology, physics, marine biology and sustainability.

### **Equity for all learners**

- The headteacher and staff have a shared aim to ensure that the children of Rum have the same opportunities as learners from other schools. This includes a clear focus on social inclusion. Staff are inventive and creative in seeking as many opportunities as possible to involve children in a wide range of activities and projects. This includes numerous visitors being invited into the school and planned residential trips off island. This year, all children enjoyed a day trip to the Isle of Eigg to have a ceilidh with their friends in Eigg Primary School. Younger children are very much looking forward to visiting the Isle of Muck this term and to have their first school camping experience with their friends in Muck Primary School. Children at P6 and P7 benefit from residential transition events in Mallaig in preparation for moving to S1. The headteacher is very ambitious for the children and the school. In turn, children respond very positively and work hard to be the best they can be.

## Practice worth sharing more widely

### **Rum Primary School and Nursery Class – a school at the heart of its community**

In her very short time in post, the inspirational headteacher has led an exceptional process of transformational change to improve the quality of children's experiences and attainment. The new staff team, led very ably by the headteacher, has worked tirelessly together in a very short time to create a welcoming, nurturing and positive environment for learning, where children thrive.

In developing a new curriculum rationale, teachers have ensured that outdoor learning is a key feature of children's learning. Staff plan highly effective use of the school grounds, woodlands, shoreline and wider island community to provide children with exciting contexts to learn. This includes high-quality opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, personalisation and choice, the life of the school and individual curriculum subjects. Children are highly knowledgeable about their island, and they enjoy sharing their expertise about the history, geography and natural environment with staff and visitors.

Children contribute significantly to the island community through very well-planned learning. They demonstrate their creativity and enterprising skills by making crafts to sell in the island gift shop. They apply their knowledge about cooking and local produce when they make haggis for the community Burns Supper, and venison burgers for the island bonfire night party. They develop important team-working, communication and critical thinking skills as they work with adults on the island community council to apply for 'Dark Skies Status', which, they hope, will boost the island's economy. As part of the community's submission, children devised lessons and activities for other children, based on their own knowledge and research of light pollution and the night skies.

Recently, children have established themselves as tour guides, hosting weekly school parties from other Highland schools who visit for the day. Children apply their leadership and communication skills very confidently in this dynamic and stimulating venture. They lead visiting children confidently on activity trails they have devised around the village and give highly informative talks. In addition, they apply their literacy, numeracy and creativity skills particularly well, as they take responsibility for planning and leading the trips. They are rightly very proud ambassadors for the Isle of Rum.

The headteacher and staff have established important partnerships with island businesses and organisations. In doing so, they ensure that children benefit from a wide range of visitors to Rum, who agree to spend time with children in school, sharing their expertise and knowledge. Children clearly enjoy these stimulating visits that help to boost their confidence in interacting with a range of adults. This is helping to broaden their horizons and understanding of the wider world, which is often a challenge for children in remote, rural schools. The headteacher and staff make every effort to ensure that children's experiences are enriched through all potential learning opportunities that the unique context provides.



## 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.