

24 November 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Shapinsay Community School and Nursery Class
Orkney Islands Council**

Recently, as you may know, we inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including how children have a say in influencing school developments, the school ethos and involvement in the community. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

There are many strengths in the way that children learn and achieve. Across the early learning and primary classes, children are enthusiastic and engage very well with their learning. In the early learning class, children are happy and confident members of the school community. They are able to make positive choices in their play activities and their views are used well to develop activities. For example, children enjoy exploring their 'vet's surgery' and discussing how they have used the camera to take photographs of their own pets. Children in the early learning class are very much part of the whole-school community. They take collective responsibility for taking care of the guinea pigs and participate in music and physical activities with the P1-3 class. Whilst children are developing an awareness of themselves as learners, they now need more help in knowing what they need to do next to improve their learning. We have discussed with staff how to give a clearer focus on next steps in learning when planning playroom activities. In both primary classes, children show a very high level of motivation in their learning. They demonstrate a high level of commitment and curiosity and behave well when working on their own, in pairs and groups. Children are very confident in initiating questions to help them explore further and deepen their learning. They are able to focus on the learning intentions of lessons and use them to evaluate their own and others' work. Through this, they are reflective and offer well-judged opinions. They do this very well across the curriculum, for example, when responding to challenges set in physical education, music and art. They respond very well when asked for their views to give direction to aspects of their own learning. Children achieve very well within the strong sense of community which is evident within the school. Across all stages, children know that their views are welcomed and the pupil council helps add value to school life. For example the council has organised a 'charity sale' which has made an important contribution to children's learning about

skills for life and work. Links with the local community are extremely strong and members of the local community told us they see the school as 'being the community'. To achieve this, the Parent Council, and community groups such as the Shapinsay Community Association and Shapinsay Development Trust give valuable support. Children participate in a wide range of community events such as charity ceilidhs, the 'Shapinsay Picnic' and the lighting of the Shapinsay Christmas tree. They enjoy taking part in a range of sporting activities including golf, swimming and football. They participate readily in cultural events such as the Orkney Folk Festival. Through these opportunities children are developing commendable confidence in singing and performance. Of particular note, is the quality of the school's annual pantomime which is now a popular date in the Shapinsay community calendar.

Children in the early learning class listen well to each other and staff during discussions. They talk with growing confidence and are able to express their own opinions. They show an interest in early reading and are able to access the library to find relevant books about their play activities. Children are developing a positive awareness of early writing and are able to write their own names when registering at the start of the session. Staff are aware of the need to develop more meaningful contexts for children to write through play. Children's numeracy skills are developing well, for example, as they explore counting and measuring when building towers with wooden blocks. They show great curiosity as they learn in the outdoor area, the play park and the poly tunnel. Overall in the primary classes, a significant number of individual children are making very good progress in mathematics and English language. Children are confident listeners and talkers and they use these skills well to enhance their learning. Almost all show a well-developed interest in reading and can discuss well-known authors and talk about the books they enjoy. In the P4-7 class, children use their reading skills effectively during research on sustainable energy. Children have responded well to recent developments to the school's approach to reading. In both classes, there are many examples of well-developed writing with younger children, for example, producing their own recipe book. By P7 children are able to write well in a variety of styles including poetry. Children respond well to active approaches to learning mathematics. They are able to explore numeracy across the curriculum and, for example, use their measurement skills when estimating how far they can project an object as part of a science experiment. Children achieve very well in other curricular areas. They are aware of the skills necessary to create a reliable scientific experiment and also use these skills when working in other areas such as experimenting with art. Through the theme, 'Made in Orkney' younger children are learning about the diversity of their own area. All children are developing a strong awareness of the history of the island through links with the Shapinsay Heritage Trust.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Children's health and wellbeing is central to the work of Shapinsay Community School. Staff use the dynamics of the small school very well to support this. There are very positive relationships between staff and children, and amongst children. As a result, staff in the early learning and primary classes support children very effectively to learn and achieve. Overall in the early learning class, activities and resources generally provide an appropriate level of challenge for children. Staff are aware that, at times, the level of challenge could be increased and sustained across all areas of learning. In the primary classes, staff ensure that tasks and activities are matched accurately to

children's learning needs. They do this very well, and flexibly, to support children of differing ages in the same class. A number of strategies are working well, including the 'Independent Learning Time' where staff plan for children across the early learning and P1 to 3 classes to work together. For older children, staff are flexible in the groups in which children work according to the activity and needs of children. Parents are involved in supporting children's learning through regular updates on the curriculum and discussing children's 'Learning Logs'. We have discussed with the headteacher ways in which these can be developed further. The headteacher and staff work together effectively to identify children who may need additional support in their learning and to plan how they will meet those needs. Relevant planning, where necessary, is in place and reviewed regularly. Support staff make an important contribution in supporting children's learning.

Staff are using Curriculum for Excellence very well to provide a wide variety of experiences for children. As a result, children benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum firmly based on what is relevant to Shapinsay School and community. Staff are ambitious for children and want them to be successful in their learning. In the past few years the headteacher and staff have improved learning across many of the areas of the curriculum. For example, all children now learn a modern language with, commendably, children in the early learning class participating as well. Learning outdoors is a key feature of the school and children are involved in how this is developed. The local area and community are used very well for planning a relevant curriculum. Children have many opportunities to make their learning meaningful through, for example visits, to Balfour Castle grounds and the island jam factory. They participate regularly in 'Bag the Bruck' to keep their local environment tidy. The expressive arts and physical education feature strongly in the curriculum with children benefitting from valuable experiences in music and art. Parents report the confidence that this has given children. Teachers develop children's learning in a number of subjects through project work making clear links across learning. They are aware that they need to refine this work to ensure these links now show more progression. Staff should continue with plans to develop the curriculum for both the early learning class and primary stages. Children are supported well as they start the early learning class, move through the school and onto Kirkwall Grammar School.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher provides highly effective leadership to the school. Together with staff, she has established a strong ethos for improvement in the school which has led to positive outcomes for children. Staff are very reflective in their work and seek opportunities to improve their practice and undertake relevant professional learning activities. This has been particularly evident in areas of the curriculum which had previously been taught by specialist teachers. The school's arrangements for monitoring the quality of its work are robust and help staff evaluate practice. The headteacher and staff gather information linked to children's attainment and they analyse this information to plan children's learning. This is particularly evident in how the school has developed its effective approach to reading. We have discussed with staff in the early learning class of the need to continue to improve how they track children's progress and use the information to ensure children are attaining across all curricular areas. The headteacher has developed procedures to gather regularly the views of children, parents and the community to help identify school developments.

The Parent Council is very supportive to the school in this and commendably members of the community have been invited into the school to discuss the school improvement plan. We are confident that these very effective approaches will develop even further and lead to continual improvements for the children of Shapinsay Community School.

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the school had no requirements and no recommendations. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and no recommendations.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Confident children who show a great pride in their learning, school and community.
- The strong and purposeful ethos for learning.
- Invaluable support from parents and the island community.
- High quality learning experiences, including in the expressive arts and physical education.
- The very effective leadership of the headteacher in supporting a strong sense of teamwork with all staff.

We discussed with staff and Orkney Islands Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue with plans to develop the curriculum together with improving further children's experiences in the early learning class.

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified an aspect of innovative practice which we would like to explore further. We shall work with the school and Orkney Islands Council to record the innovative practice and share it more widely.

Alan Urquhart
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/ShapinsayPrimarySchoolOrkneyIslands.asp>

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