

9 December 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on Brae High School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Shetland Islands Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children, young people and parents and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Senior leaders need to improve approaches to evaluating the work of the school. Senior and middle leaders should use this information more effectively to help them identify key priorities for school improvement.

Strong progress has been made in this area by the school.

Senior and middle leaders have worked well and at pace to improve their approaches to evaluating the work of the school. This includes a significant amount of reflection on school performance and priorities, along with considerable planned professional learning for staff. There are now clear systems and processes in place for evaluating many aspects of school life. These approaches have helped staff develop a fuller understanding of using data to make improvements across the school. Staff now have an accurate understanding of what has gone well and what still needs to improve.

Across the school, senior leaders identified accurately appropriate priorities for improvement and have focused on improving the learning environment and supporting all children and young people. In addition, they have focused rightly on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Departmental improvement priorities are more closely aligned to school improvement priorities. Staff have ensured that these priorities are increasingly measurable, actionable, and aligned to clear outcomes for young people.

A few senior pupils have been appointed as Head Learners and Depute Head Learners within the school. These young people are beginning to use "How Good is OUR School?" to evaluate the work of the school. They have created self-evaluative video evidence and are now creating presentations to deliver to children and young people across the school. These presentations are focused on the different parts required to be an aspirational learner. As a result, there are early signs of raising the profile of learning across the school.

Middle leaders need to continue to develop their collective responsibility to lead change and plan for improvement. They need to recognise and demonstrate their whole school responsibilities more effectively.

Effective progress has been made in this area by the school.

Middle leaders demonstrate their whole school responsibilities effectively. Senior leaders created four collaborative improvement teams. Each team links clearly with the main priorities in the school and departmental improvement plans. This provides clear roles for middle leaders to lead significant aspects of school improvement. Middle leaders are now working together more effectively to make real and lasting improvements in the experiences for children and young people across both the primary and secondary departments.

Middle leaders are developing well their collective responsibility to lead change and plan for improvement. Senior leaders have developed a consistent approach to quality assure the work across the school. This includes middle leaders sharing approaches to observe others teach, moderating and sampling pupil work, having termly discussions about pupil progress and regular discussions about sharing professional learning. Young people in the secondary school recognise the increasing consistency of experiences and expectations across departments. Senior leaders should continue to improve approaches to lesson observations. They should ensure observations result in staff receiving helpful feedback that informs improvement at an individual, departmental and whole-school level.

Middle leaders in the secondary school now review routinely young people's attainment in courses across different attainment levels within their department. This data helps teachers understand better where there are any specific areas of the courses which cause young people more difficulty. This also enables staff to identify what they need to do differently or how they can support young people better to be successful. Middle leaders are at the early stages of engaging with the newly developed whole school tracking system for attainment from S1 to S3. They should continue to encourage and enable teachers to become more proficient in using this type of data to raise attainment for children and young people.

In the nursery, senior leaders need to continue to develop methods of gathering evidence on the quality of learning, teaching and assessment in order to embed fully these approaches.

The new nursery manager has recently begun to make progress in this area.

Senior leaders have gathered appropriate evidence on the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. They have developed an appropriate action plan to improve how staff plan and implement learning, teaching and assessment. Senior leaders have identified correctly that the new staff team need to work on improving floor books and learning story books to accurately document children's progress in learning. The nursery team have identified the need to ensure that they are able to identify more clearly children's next steps in learning.

In the school, teachers need to provide appropriate tasks and activities set at the right level for all children and young people to help them make better progress in their learning. This includes providing more high-quality learning experiences and teachers adapting learning activities as required to meet the needs of all children and young people.

Suitable progress has been made in this area by the school.

In the majority of classes in the primary department, teachers provide helpful oral and written feedback to children which helps children know their next steps in learning. Teachers should

now develop further their understanding of planning tasks and activities to better meet the needs of all children. Staff should continue to work together to build on the good start to improving approaches to teaching, learning and assessment to make it more consistent across the school. In a few lessons the pace of learning is still too slow. A few children would benefit from more challenge in their learning. Senior leaders should work with staff to maximise teaching time across the school day.

In the majority lessons in the secondary departments, teachers use starter or review type activities effectively to check prior learning or to introduce something new. Teachers share the purpose of learning and how children and young people will know they have been successful effectively in the majority of lessons. They use questioning techniques and plenaries well to check young people's knowledge. There is still variability in the quality of the delivery of all aspects of the 'Learning and Teaching Framework'. Senior leaders have identified correctly that staff now need to move from understanding the framework, to developing a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching in each aspect of the framework. Senior and middle leaders should continue to explore how best to share and embed the good practice that already exists in the school more widely.

Teachers should continue to develop programmes and courses that build on prior learning more effectively.

Suitable progress has been made in this area by the school.

Teachers in the primary department now use progression pathways for the majority of curricular areas. This helps to ensure that children continually build on their knowledge and understanding and develop related skills. Teachers have improved their approach to teaching learning which uses links across different subjects. Teachers have a clear plan for developing progression pathways over a three-year cycle. This should help children build on their learning in all subjects as they move through the school.

Since the original inspection senior leaders have considered ways to maximise the attainment of young people from S4-S6. This includes an increase in the range of courses on offer. Most middle leaders have introduced new pathways and courses that will better meet the needs of young people. Staff have also developed more pathways through effective partnership working and are currently engaging in professional learning to extend the curriculum further.

The successful Community Café exemplifies how young people are developing confidence, employability skills, and leadership in authentic contexts. This supports young people well to develop their skills in real-life contexts.

An important next step is for senior leaders to work with staff, young people and their parents to develop an agreed strategic plan for what young people learn across S1 to S6. This should link closely with the school's plans to raise attainment and achievement.

In the school, staff need to have higher expectations of what children and young people can attain and achieve in order to raise attainment and achievement.

Suitable progress has been made in this area by the school.

The new school vision of 'Discovering our true north' is supporting the developing culture of high expectations within the school. Together with establishing the 'features of aspirational learners' work, these provide useful prompts to help staff raise aspirations and be ambitious for all children and young people.

Teachers in the primary department are more fully involved in analysing data to inform teaching and learning. They track the progress of groups of children. Senior leaders and staff have worked together to improve approaches to tracking and monitoring the progress of young people from S1 to S3. A whole school tracking and monitoring system is now in place across all curriculum areas from S1 to S3. Senior leaders track the progress of young people well in the senior phase. Teachers, across the school, are at the early stages of analysing this data more rigorously.

Middle leaders now benefit from rigorous attainment meetings with senior leaders to analyse the progress of all children and young people. This helps identify patterns and trends and also enhances the monitoring of children and young people who are not achieving as expected. These meetings help identify where support or interventions are required at an early stage. Senior leaders should now develop and implement a very clear process outlining the roles and responsibilities of all staff following these attainment meetings.

There are clear signs of improvement in children and young people's attainment. In the primary department strong progress has been made in writing. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to encourage children to write at length. In numeracy, staff need to ensure that children have fluency in times tables, are confident in adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing numbers appropriate to their age and stage. Staff need to now teach strategies for mental mathematics more formally. In the secondary school, improvements were noted in aspects of literacy and numeracy at S4 and S6. More young people are being presented for more qualifications at the senior phase and the overall pass rate from National 5 to Advanced Higher qualifications improved from 2024 to 2025. Teachers should continue to focus on raising attainment, particularly at S5.

What happens next?

The school has made appropriate progress in all areas since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Shetland Islands Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Frances E. Graham
HM Inspector