

15 September 2026

Dear Parent/Carer

In June 2025, HM Inspectors published a letter on Stromness Academy. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Orkney Islands Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to young people 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 should improve strategic leadership across the school. All staff should be clear on their role in supporting improvements that result in positive outcomes for young people. They should develop well-embedded approaches to measuring and evaluating the quality of the work of the school.**

Senior leaders have made improvements to strategic leadership across the school. They recognise that they need more time to refine and embed recent improvements.

The headteacher reviewed the remits of senior and middle leaders successfully. This is helping senior leaders to focus on taking forward a strategy for improvement. Middle leaders and staff focus appropriately on leading change to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. A majority of middle leaders now lead departments more effectively and an increasing number of staff are leading change. However, the quality and impact of middle leadership remains an area of focus. Senior leaders should continue to develop staff's skills and ability to lead and embed improvements to learner experiences and attainment.

Senior leaders have implemented a number of new processes successfully to support greater clarity about planned school improvements and the management of change across the school. They have introduced a range of positive approaches to measure the impact of the work of the school. This is beginning to help staff understand how to use evidence to review the implementation of improvements. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop how they use quality assurance to identify whole-school improvement priorities. Senior and middle leaders have improved how they plan for improvements. They should continue to work together to ensure improvement priorities are specific and measurable. They should consider how ongoing quality assurance helps them to measure the impact of strategic changes, particularly in relation to the outcomes achieved for young people.

Staff consult and seek the views of young people through the pupil council. These learners helped review the school's code of conduct and anti-bullying policy well. Staff should develop further how they capture stakeholder's views and show how these views inform change. The Parent Council is well-placed to play a more prominent role in school improvement.

**All staff need to improve the quality and consistency of learning and teaching across the school. Teachers need to embed positive classroom routines. They need to be more responsive to the needs of learners, including a majority who require increased pace and challenge in their learning.**

Teachers have made improvements to the consistency and quality of learning, teaching and assessment. However, there remain aspects that need further improvements.

Senior leaders use positive approaches to improve learning, teaching and assessment. These include well-considered whole-school professional learning and teachers working together effectively to share and develop practice in small groups. Teachers have developed individual plans to improve their teaching based on their strengths and development needs. Senior leaders use the Stromness Academy lesson evaluation toolkit to support a greater understanding and application of agreed standards. This is helping teachers to apply more consistent classroom routines. A majority of staff now use well-considered starter activities and introduce lessons well by sharing the purpose of learning and measures of success. A minority of teachers use success criteria effectively to review learner's progress during and at the end of lessons. More teachers should do this and continue to improve the quality of the measures of success. A few teachers use questions skilfully to review young people's progress and use this to plan next steps in learning. Most teachers use questions during lessons well to check learners' knowledge. A few teachers challenge young people to think deeply about their learning through higher-order questions. Senior and middle leaders should continue to develop a shared understanding of high-quality learning, teaching and assessment across the school. They should build on emerging strong practice across the school by ensuring approaches are widely adopted and embedded by all.

In a few lessons, teachers plan effectively to provide appropriate support and challenge to meet the needs of all learners. However, across the school, most young people usually complete the same tasks and activities at the same pace. A majority of young people need a more appropriate pace to their learning based on their needs and abilities, including those who require increased challenge in their learning. A majority of teachers need to provide learning activities that take better account of the needs of all young people.

**Middle leaders and teachers need to work together to improve the shared understanding of national standards relating to the broad general education (S1 – S3). Teachers need to use assessment strategies better to measure the progress of learners more accurately.**

Staff have made strong progress in relation to this priority area. There remain aspects that require further improvements. Staff benefitted from professional learning to develop their skills in applying national standards better. A majority of teachers apply national standards more consistently which is improving the reliability of their professional judgements of learner progress. Senior and middle leaders should continue to support teachers to engage in moderation activities in, across and outwith the school. This includes with local primary schools.

Almost all staff use regular and appropriate assessments to measure young people's progress. A majority of staff are using a wider range of relevant assessment approaches. Middle leaders should develop how teachers use information from assessments of young people's progress to plan for future learning. Teachers should continue to develop the range of assessments used to measure young people's progress during learning.

Senior and middle leaders now track young people's progress in S1 to S3 more systematically. Teachers should continue to develop their confidence in using data to provide support to young people who are off track in their learning or those needing increased challenge.

**Senior and middle leaders should improve their strategic overview of the attainment of young people over time. They should work with staff to improve their ability to use data effectively to advance their practice and raise the attainment of young people.**

Senior and middle leaders have made positive progress towards this area of improvement. They use learning about national benchmarking tools and standardised assessments well to validate teacher judgements of learner's attainment. This learning should be extended to all staff. Senior leaders have made improvements to whole-school monitoring and tracking systems. This is helping senior and middle leaders to review young people's progress across all curricular areas. Middle leaders should continue to support teachers to use tracking data to review and make improvements to their practice. Senior leaders and middle leaders have improved approaches to annual attainment reviews. This work is at an early stage and there is a need for a greater consistency of approach across the school. Middle leaders should ensure attainment reviews support improvements, such as to the delivery of the curriculum.

Importantly, almost all staff use the language of Curriculum for Excellence levels more routinely with young people. This helps learners to understand their progress better. Senior leaders and increasingly middle leaders are using a range of approaches to ensure teacher professional judgements are valid and reliable. Almost all teachers use a progression framework effectively to compare the attainment of young people to national milestones. This is helping them to identify better those exceeding expectations or underachieving. Senior and middle leaders should now work with staff to identify a range of interventions to be used to help a young person who is not on track in their learning. They should outline more clearly the roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in raising attainment.

## **What happens next?**

The school has made progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Orkney Islands Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Orkney Islands Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Graham Parry  
HM Inspector

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.