



**Letham Primary School
and Nursery Class
By Forfar
Angus Council
29 September 2009**

This report tells you about the quality of education at the school¹. We describe how children benefit from learning there. We explain how well they are doing and how good the school is at helping them to learn. Then we look at the ways in which the school does this. We describe how well the school works with other groups in the community, including parents² and services which support children. We also comment on how well staff and children work together and how they go about improving the school.

Our report describes the ‘ethos’ of the school. By ‘ethos’ we mean the relationships in the school, how well children are cared for and treated and how much is expected of them in all aspects of school life. Finally, we comment on the school’s aims. In particular, we focus on how well the aims help staff to deliver high quality learning, and the impact of leadership on the school’s success in achieving these aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.hmie.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns. Where applicable, you will also be able to find descriptions of good practice in the school.

¹ The term ‘school’ is used to include the work of the nursery class, where relevant.

² Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Letham Primary School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class. It serves the village of Letham and the surrounding rural area. The roll was 195, including 17 in the nursery, when the inspection was carried out in June 2009. There have been a number of staff changes. Children's attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- Polite, confident children who are keen to learn.
- Children's learning experiences.
- Staff commitment and teamwork.
- The headteacher's success in developing strong links with parents and the wider community.

3. Example of good practice

- Developing active learning throughout the school.

4. How well do children learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

In the nursery class, children enjoy their learning and experience success in the activities they choose. Staff help them to develop a positive attitude to learning. Children learn through play activities which the early years worker supports particularly well. Children share resources and play confidently together. Across the primary stages, children are highly motivated, confident and learn well together, particularly in groups on practical tasks. For example, at P6 they developed their learning about air resistance through practical tasks in science. Children enjoy the range of active learning opportunities, particularly when they work outdoors together. Across the school, they are able to think clearly and imaginatively through the stimulating tasks

they are set outdoors and successfully solve problems independently. Most children can discuss what they have learned and are clear about what they need to do to improve their writing. This good practice is not yet consistent across other areas of the curriculum.

In the nursery class, children recycle and care for the environment. They can describe and record weather conditions with confidence. Children at the primary stages are enthusiastic and proud of their achievements. They take part enthusiastically in a wide range of sports and cultural activities such as football, basketball, swimming, cricket, country dancing and drama. Children in P7 develop their self-confidence and social skills effectively through taking part in popular residential trips. They help younger children experience success in their learning, for example by reading together and playing number partner games.

In the nursery class, children are making good progress. They listen well and take part in conversations confidently. They choose books independently to find information and really enjoy stories. They express their own ideas confidently in drawings. They now need to further develop their early skills in writing. Children can count and order numbers and match and sort objects skilfully. They are learning about time using clocks and calendars and can use construction toys to solve simple problems. At the primary stages, almost all children attain appropriate national levels of attainment in reading and mathematics and most do so in writing. In recent years, standards of attainment have remained high. Children are making very good progress from their earlier levels of attainment in reading and good progress in listening, talking, writing and mathematics. In English language, children listen attentively in class discussions and talk confidently about their interests and the books they are reading. Younger children in particular read fluently, with good expression and also read widely for pleasure. Older children do not always write enough at length for a range of purposes. Their spelling and handwriting is not always of a good enough standard. In mathematics, across the school, almost all children are accurate in mental and written calculations. They can interpret a range of graphs well.

Children in P5 and P7 use a wide range of skills to solve mathematical problems together outdoors. Across the school, children are able to solve mathematical problems well and can describe the strategies they use.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

Staff provide children with a good curriculum overall. In the nursery, children experience a broad and interesting range of tasks and activities. In the primary classes, staff have made a promising start to developing the curriculum in line with the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. For example, they are using more active approaches to learning to enhance children's experiences. They are successful in encouraging children to work together through shared approaches to learning. Staff are working towards providing two hours of quality physical education each week for all pupils. They need to improve the opportunities for younger children to learn through play. Older children would benefit from more opportunities to use information and communications technology (ICT) to support their mathematical learning.

The school does not yet meet children's learning needs well enough. Staff in the nursery know children well and plan a good range of learning opportunities for them. They are beginning to make good use of children's interests and ideas when planning activities to ensure the learning needs of all children are well met. In the primary classes, tasks and activities match the learning needs of most learners. A number of mathematics and writing activities are too easy for higher achieving children. Teachers give clear explanations and share the purposes of lessons with children. They do not make enough use of assessment when planning classwork. As a result, they take insufficient account of what children already know. Teachers mostly encourage children to express their views and share ideas together. The quality of support for children with additional support needs (ASN) is too variable. The ASN teacher provides helpful guidance to staff and support to individual children across the school who are having difficulties with their learning. The school does not do enough to

ensure that support staff work with children who most need support. Teachers are giving children more varied homework which helps them to learn.

5. How well do staff work with others to support children's learning?

Staff have very effective partnerships with a good range of organisations outside the school, particularly the English as an additional language teacher and the speech and language service. The school has strong links with parents and the community. Members of the community visit the school often to help children learn about the work they do. The Letham Twinning Association provides financial support for a stimulating ICT link with children in a school in Ireland. Parents feel that the headteacher is approachable and keeps them informed about how they can help with their children's learning. For example, the headteacher has recently held a well-attended meeting to explain how the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*, will be taken forward across the school. Nursery parents use diaries well to communicate with staff about their children's learning at home and in nursery. Teachers provide helpful information to parents about children's progress through annual progress reports and meetings. The school is aware of the need to alter the timing of the second meeting which is held in mid-June. The Parent Council supports the school well through many fundraising events. Parents have helped to create a 'Willow tunnel' and garden to encourage an interest nature and wildlife. The school deals with complaints or concerns promptly and effectively. The school consults parents appropriately about sensitive health issues. Staff prepare children well for their move from nursery to primary and from P7 to Forfar Academy.

6. Are staff and children actively involved in improving their school community?

Across the school, children are good at taking responsibilities. As a result of their efforts, the school has gained a green flag from Eco-Schools Scotland and an award for health promotion. The pupil council produces regular information leaflets about what is happening in school. Older children help younger children develop good reading habits. Staff work very well together as a team to improve the work of the school. They have taken the lead on key areas of responsibility and their work is improving children's learning experiences. Staff are increasingly involved in evaluating their work and the work of the school. Teachers and senior staff are not yet using information about children's learning to track children's progress effectively enough. They need to build more effectively on children's prior learning when planning activities, particularly when children move from nursery to P1.

7. Does the school have high expectations of all children?

The nursery is very welcoming and the children are happy and comfortable with nursery routines. In the primary classes, children are proud of their school and behave very well. They are confident that the school will deal effectively with any incidents of bullying. Displays around the school celebrate children's achievements. Children feel protected and valued in school and know what to do if they have any concerns. They understand the importance of making healthy choices at snack and lunch times and know ways of staying safe and healthy. Staff have very positive relationships with children. They are committed to support the wellbeing of all children and have an appropriate awareness of child protection procedures. Staff do not have high enough expectations of what some children can attain in their learning. Staff successfully promote equality and fairness and an understanding of other cultures. Children have regular opportunities for religious observance.

8. Does the school have a clear sense of direction?

The headteacher has shared her clear vision with staff, children and parents very effectively. She has developed strong partnerships with parents and the community. As a result, there is a shared understanding of how the school needs to develop. The school has two job sharing depute headteachers, one of whom was on leave of absence during the inspection. Senior managers now need to share roles and responsibilities more effectively. Staff respond very well to their hardworking headteacher and teamwork is now strong. The headteacher's effective leadership skills ensure that, despite changes in staffing, children across the school benefit from consistently high quality learning experiences. Staff are strongly committed to making further improvements. The school is well placed to keep improving.

9. What happens next?

We are confident that the school will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits following this inspection. The school and the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress in improving the quality of education.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and education authority.

- Continue to strengthen the curriculum, including extending children's opportunities to learn through play at P1 and P2.
- Meet the learning needs of all children more fully.
- Improve the monitoring and tracking of children's attainment and achievement to build more effectively upon their prior learning, particularly from nursery to P1.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class, there were no requirements or recommendations.

Quality indicators help schools and nursery classes, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of a school and a nursery class. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publications *How good is our school?* and *The Child at the Centre*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools and nursery classes are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Letham Primary School and Nursery Class.

Primary school

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Improvements in performance | good |
| Learners' experiences | very good |
| Meeting learning needs | satisfactory |

Nursery class

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Improvements in performance | good |
| Children's experiences | very good |
| Meeting learning needs | good |

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school and nursery class.

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| The curriculum | good |
| Improvement through self-evaluation | satisfactory |

HM Inspector: June Graham
29 September 2009

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| excellent | outstanding, sector leading |
| very good | major strengths |
| good | important strengths with some areas for improvement |
| satisfactory | strengths just outweigh weaknesses |
| weak | important weaknesses |
| unsatisfactory | major weaknesses |