

Summarised inspection findings

Baltasound Junior High School

Shetland Islands Council

9 June 2026

Key contextual information

School name: Baltasound Junior High School

Council: Shetland Islands Council

SEED number: 6103138

Roll (April 2026): 89

Baltasound Junior High School is a non-denominational, comprehensive school located in Baltasound on the island of Unst, in the Shetland Islands. This is the most northerly school on the most northerly inhabited island in the United Kingdom. The school is classified as both rural and remote.

Children and young people attend the school from nursery into primary and into secondary, until the end of S4. Eighty-nine children and young people attend the school, with 12 children in the nursery, 48 children across three primary classes and 29 young people in S1 to S4. When young people finish S4, they end their school-level education or attend another school within the local authority to continue into S5 and S6.

The headteacher has been in post for ten years. He is supported by a deputy headteacher and a principal teacher.

Attendance is consistently above the national average.

All learners reside within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile 5. In September 2024, 20% of children in P6 to P7 and 30.8% of young people in S1 to S4 were registered for free school meals. In September 2024, 53% of children in P1 to P7 and 50% of young people in S1 to S4 had additional support needs.

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher provides inspirational and values-based leadership to the school and community. He ensures the experiences of children, young people and the community remain central to his approach to school improvement. The headteacher has an ambitious vision for the school and shares passionately the strengths and positive journey the school has taken. The headteacher is determined to ensure all learners have parity of experience with other learners across Scotland. He leads successfully a strong school ethos that seeks opportunities and positive outcomes from the school's remote geographical setting which outweigh the challenges of this geography. Since his appointment, the headteacher has worked with staff to transform and make significant improvements to the culture and approaches to change across the school. For example, he has established a shared culture where staff recognise children and young people's experience of learning in nursery, primary and secondary classes within one setting and work together very effectively as one school, rather than separate stages. This results in children and young people experiencing strong transitions at each stage and continuity in their learning experiences.
- The headteacher is supported very effectively by the school leadership team. Together, they adapt and respond positively to the opportunities and challenges faced in their rural and remote context. The headteacher and leadership team use a highly collaborative and empowering approach to working with staff, valuing the views of all stakeholders when making changes to practice. This ensures staff develop approaches that meet very well the needs of the children and young people. These approaches help children and young people to develop well the skills and attributes required to thrive within and beyond their community.
- Almost all staff feel highly valued and understand clearly their role in supporting children to succeed in and beyond the school. They value and use very effectively the autonomy and trust given to them by the leadership team when leading improvements. This has led to a culture where staff work independently and proactively to lead change and improvements, but are also supported in this. Staff lead different elements of the school improvement plan. This has resulted in, for example, staff-led initiatives being successfully embedded such as the successful introduction of new learning and teaching approaches in primary classes and common approaches to identified skills in secondary classes.
- The leadership team worked collaboratively with all stakeholders to develop the school's motto, vision and values. The school motto of 'peerie school, big dreams' reflects very well the context of the school and ambition of its staff for the school community. The motto and work around it is repeatedly and successfully reinforced in the school. For example, the principles

which underpin it informed decisions made around individual pathways and increased qualification offers for young people in the secondary stages. Staff work tirelessly to source opportunities for their learners which would not otherwise be available on the island. For example, young people experience an extensive range of work placements which link very well to their future aspirations. Staff ensure that location, travel, financial constraints and accommodation are not barriers to young people's work placement or other opportunities. The school community selected the values of 'ready, respectful and safe' to ensure they are clear, accessible, easily understood by children and young people at all stages and reflect the aspirations of staff for all learners. The values are embedded very well across the school and children speak confidently and articulately about how these values impact positively on their school experience. They are subject to ongoing review and consideration by the full school community.

- The leadership team have managed the pace of change very well, despite ongoing recruitment issues over a number of years. The leadership team have embedded very successfully a robust and bespoke approach to quality assurance which is mapped to How good is our school? 4th edition. They conduct a range of very well-considered activities such as class visits, data analysis, pupil voice, staff professional learning and their knowledge of the school's context to identify required improvement targets. The leadership team's collaborative approach ensures almost all staff talk knowledgeably about the school's strengths and understand very well their shared focus for improvement. As a result, the school community moves forward and implements change very successfully as a cohesive and collaborative body with very clear shared focus. This is expressed very well through a common, shared understanding of school improvement priorities. Staff within the school's line management structure relate their own professional development very clearly and effectively to whole school priorities.
- Staff engage very positively with a wide range of professional learning to enhance their practice. They use school and local authority training opportunities very well to inform their thinking and align their own development effectively with whole school priorities. Staff use national guidance, current research and educational experts to refine their approach to pedagogy and the curriculum to meet the needs of learners within their context. As a result of a clear, shared understanding of the value of professional learning and a very collaborative and empowering environment, almost all staff lead developments in the school. These well-informed and evidence-based developments lead to clear improvements in children and young people's experiences. For example, teachers have led improvements to the teaching of writing which has helped children and young people to improve, staff have become significantly upskilled in supporting learners with complex needs and there is a successfully embedded approach to play in the primary classes. Teachers should continue to use their professional learning to lead on further improvements in the school.
- The leadership team, supported well by staff, think exceptionally creatively to source funding and resources to enhance not only their practice but to improve experiences for children and young people. The wider staff take full advantage of the school's place in the heart of the island community to successfully maintain and develop community and business links, support and fundraising. For example, this includes using monies raised at 'the Teas' events on the island to support trips and learner experiences in addition to universal school developments such as funding professional learning. The ongoing involvement of community groups, such as the Jarl Squads during the recent Up Helly Aa festivals, is recognised by the leadership team as an important part of the school's success. This approach successfully maintains and increases

the range of learning experiences available to children and young people and strengthens learners' roles within the wider community. Community partners and local businesses identify with the school values and provide a range of targeted active learning opportunities for children and young people. These meet children and young people's needs and align with Developing the Young Workforce priorities and the local economy. Partnership working is a major strength of the school.

- The headteacher, staff, children and young people and the wider community are strong ambassadors for their school. A minority of staff demonstrate a deep commitment to supporting system wide improvement and are proactive in influencing positive change for learners across Scotland. They are solution-focused and think creatively about how they can reach colleagues beyond the island to support their practice. The headteacher, depute headteacher and class teachers have shared their practice and steps to improving school approaches across the local authority and nationally through in-person training, providing training online and sharing practice through an external podcast on issues such as supporting learners' needs, digital learning and play.
- Teachers at all stages gather a wide range of data and evidence about children and young people's progress and achievements. Each learner builds not only a self-reflective profile of their achievements and skills, but staff also build a wealth of valuable individualised data and evidence to show learners' progress over time. These learner journeys provide a robust overview of learners' progress. The leadership team should consider how to streamline this evidence to support a few staff to understand better all learners' progress and achievement to aid in their planning of learning and teaching.
- Almost all children and young people improve their communication and teamwork skills through their involvement in committees, events and pupil leadership groups over their time in school. Children and young people have a shared understanding of how their voice impacts positively and meaningfully on school improvement. Staff consult all learners regularly to ensure their views and lived experiences influence policy and approaches. This further supports and develops children and young people to be empowered in leading changes in the school and in the community. For example, children and young people have been proactive in organising themselves to campaign and fundraise to support initiatives like the teaching of swimming and of trips.
- Staff demonstrate an inclusive and well-considered approach to ensuring parents' voices are sought and used to develop the work of the school. For example, the headteacher consults all stakeholders on the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) in order to inform decision making about its use. Staff value the role parents play in supporting their child's education and they invest in opportunities to share the learning with parents. For example, staff have developed a thorough parental involvement and engagement strategy. Staff's highly effective approaches to communicating, sharing and involving parents in the life of the school supports parents to have a better understanding of their child's learning through, for example, the embedded and highly successful 'bring your parent to school day'.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

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

- Across the school, highly positive, respectful relationships underpin a warm, inclusive and supportive ethos. This strong relational culture supports high levels of engagement and contributes to calm, purposeful learning environments. Children, young people and staff uphold and demonstrate the school values of 'ready, respectful, and safe'. These values underpin well the daily life and work of the school.
- Children and young people are polite, friendly, and welcoming. They are proud of their school community and talk enthusiastically with adults and peers about their school experiences and their learning. Children and young people are involved actively in choosing elements of how and what they learn. At times throughout their learning, staff give children and young people opportunities to influence the topics, contexts and structure of blocks of learning, as well as how they work during lessons. For example, young people in secondary classes choose the order in which they study social subjects through the year, or how they want to express their learning in expressive arts. Children and young people benefit from highly innovative opportunities to lead their own learning in the development of digital learning. For example, young people identified tools which would have benefited their home learning in previous years and developed digital applications to support younger children with this.
- Staff focus appropriately on ensuring all learners experience increased challenge in their learning. A minority of staff work collaboratively to share approaches in order to improve the pace and challenge during lessons. This is helping a few staff to use creative approaches well, such as extension tasks, hinge questions and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in planning. Whilst most learners experience appropriate pace and challenge in their learning, a few require greater, accelerated challenge and pace to ensure they achieve to their full potential.
- The leadership team, staff and other stakeholders developed the school's learning policy, 'four tenets of teaching'. Most staff use this policy consistently well to underpin their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The four tenets set out clearly and concisely what makes an effective lesson. However, in addition it also sets out with equal importance how teachers should plan, assess and track learning. The leadership team should continue to support teachers to develop this consistency further.
- Almost all lessons across the school are structured well. Most teachers plan carefully their lesson content and the activities which support learning. In most lessons, teachers use starter activities effectively to check understanding, or to revisit prior learning. In most lessons,

teachers explain the purpose of learning and what learners need to do to achieve success. In the most effective examples, teachers and learners evaluate their understanding of these measures of success throughout or at the end of a block of learning. They use plenaries well to encourage children and young people to reflect more deeply on their learning. A next step for teachers in the school, particularly in secondary classes, is to embed consistently high-quality measures of success across all subjects. This should help to focus young people more consistently on how to be successful in their learning across the school week.

- In almost all lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. Almost all teachers ask questions to check for understanding and to help young people make links with prior learning. In most lessons, teachers use skilled questioning techniques to encourage children and young people to think more deeply about their learning. This practice should be shared widely and embedded to ensure all children and young people develop their higher-order thinking skills.
- Staff have developed a well-considered and effective approach to the use of play across primary classes. Led very ably by a few staff, they have reviewed and refined how play supports children to learn and apply skills over a number of years. This has ensured that there is a shared understanding about play across the lower, middle and upper primary classes. Staff have used professional learning, research, national guidance and school data to ensure that children develop a wide range of skills which support them to be confident and resilient learners. Staff blend very well free play and playful experiences to ensure children develop curiosity, creativity and their critical thinking skills. Children are excited about their play. Play supports children to collaborate effectively and adapt their designs to improve models and structures. Children write freely, using their knowledge of sounds and writing structures to create books. Staff have a very strong understanding of their role as the adult and know when to observe, prompt, question or scaffold learning. Staff are exploring how they track children's development through play. As they continue to refine this approach, they should ensure there is a clear and shared understanding about the wide range of evidence required to evidence accurately children's skills development.
- Staff and learners have faced barriers until recently in using online resources for learning due to local infrastructure and connectivity challenges. Despite this, staff have ensured that children and young people have benefited from highly innovative and creative approaches in using digital technologies as a tool for their learning. For example, this has included the use of artificial intelligence to develop different tools for learning and as a way for older learners to support younger learners with transition at different stages of their school journey. Children and young people have benefited greatly from very innovative practice which has supported them to collaborate, learn from peers and lead their own learning. For example, young people used sensors and processors to design, build and test a security alarm system for the school doors. They used development software to create a face recognition system. Young people in S2 used a no-code mobile app development platform to create a digital application they then used to support peers in the lower primary classes. As a result of experiences like these, learners' understanding of digital technologies is enriched greatly.
- Almost all teachers provide high-quality feedback to children and young people in a variety of ways. This feedback supports learners to understand their progress and next steps through lessons and topics. Most children and young people agree that the feedback they receive improves their learning.

- Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessments to support judgements of learners' progress across the broad general education (BGE) from P1 to S3 and in senior phase in S4. Teachers use experiences and outcomes effectively to plan progressively their lessons, courses and relevant assessment within the BGE. This supports teachers' confidence in using a range of robust evidence to assess children and young people's progress against national standards. In most lessons, teachers use formative assessment techniques effectively to modify their planned lessons based on learners' responses. In a minority of subjects in secondary stages, staff have collated national Benchmarks into booklets of "I can..." statements. These support young people to evaluate their own progress within a level.
- Almost all teachers are involved in appropriate moderation activities with colleagues within and outwith the school. The leadership team are relentless in ensuring moderation activities occur and that the school's small size and remote setting are not an obstacle to this. For example, staff engage in regular, scheduled verification of work across classes, subjects and primary and secondary stages to agree relevant standards. The leadership team upskill themselves to provide professional support and challenge to colleagues when working across subjects. Staff should continue to engage with wider forms of moderation. A few secondary teachers undertake duties for Qualifications Scotland. This supports those teachers to develop their knowledge of senior phase qualifications, assessment, moderation and support networks across Scotland.
- The leadership team and teachers track and monitor the progress of each learner through the BGE. Teachers also store comprehensive evidence of learners' work in a digital tracking and progress folder. This evidence is considered and discussed regularly and supports teachers very well to plan to support children and young people on an individual basis.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- In P1 to S3, teachers use helpful progression pathways linked to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes and national Benchmarks.
- Children and young people benefit increasingly from a diverse, engaging and stimulating range of learning experiences. Activities within the curriculum are influenced frequently by the local school context and the surrounding area. Children and young people's sense of local citizenship and identity is strengthened through experiences such as Unst and Space Week. Children in primary classes also regularly engage in outdoor activities to support and enhance their learning.
- Children and young people undertake learning within all curriculum areas in the BGE between P1 and S3.
- Children and young people experience progressive learning in physical education (PE) and religious education throughout their time in school. The leadership team should consider ways in which the time allocated to children's PE learning better matches national expectations.
- All children and young people learn French from P4 to S3. However, children in P1 to P3 do not learn a modern language. Children in P4 to P7 are also learning a key-word sign language focused on the local dialect. Young people in S1-S3 do not yet have the option to study a second additional language. The leadership team should continue with plans to review the delivery of modern languages to ensure that all children and young people receive their entitlement in line with the Scottish Government's 1+2 language learning policy.
- Almost all young people choose seven subjects plus English and mathematics as they move from S2 to S3. Young people then select seven subjects as they continue into the senior phase in S4. Teachers help young people to make informed subject choices as they progress through the school. Staff ensure effective transitions for young people as they move to S5 in another local authority school, college, work or training.
- The Skills Development Scotland Careers Advisor associated with the school has an effective working relationship with the leadership team. The Careers Advisor offers appointments for pupils to attend careers advice sessions, and these are effective in supporting young people to make informed career choices and plan for what comes next after S4.
- All young people in S4 engage in a work placement during their time at school. This helps them to align their subject choices with potential career pathways and increases their experience of the world of work.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents receive very helpful information about their child's progress through a broad range of methods. These include parents' evenings, written reports, termly newsletters, and a comprehensive, high-quality school website. They value very highly these regular and detailed communications from the school. Parents also speak enthusiastically about the openness and approachability of staff at any time when they wish to discuss their child's learning and progress.
- The Parent Council plays an active and important role in supporting the work of the school. It is involved in collaborative discussions around school improvement during regular meetings with the headteacher. The headteacher shares the school improvement plan with the Parent Council and seeks their views. The Parent Council is also actively involved in providing resources for the school. It works to source grants and funding from various local businesses and partners, and through running community events. Funds raised are used, for example, to fully cover transport costs for trips and improve the playground.
- Almost all children and young people take part in the very successful 'bring your parent to school' days. Staff also run sessions for parents on aspects of education and learning, for example, phonics in primary classes. There are also well-attended events throughout the school year such as awards ceremonies, shows, and art exhibitions. Feedback from these events from parents and children and young people is overwhelmingly positive and they help embed the culture of community and cooperation between the school and parents. Almost all parents are satisfied with the school and would recommend it to other parents.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children and young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Children and young people benefit from being members of a highly inclusive and welcoming school community where relationships with each other and with staff are very strong. The leadership team have worked very effectively with staff to establish this positive and nurturing ethos which is reflected well in daily interactions throughout the school. As a result, children and young people thrive in a school environment to which they demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and of which they are extremely proud.
- The school is central to the local island community. Staff share a very strong understanding of the needs of the local community and how this may affect the needs and wellbeing of children and young people. To support this community relationship, the leadership team introduced a highly successful 'bring your parent to school day'. This approach is now embedded in practice and has been very effective in building yet closer relationships with parents and families. This has become an essential part of the highly individualised support from staff which benefits strongly children and young people. As a result, staff have been able to use these enhanced relationships to support children and young people even more effectively.
- Children and young people are supported exceptionally well on an individual basis by school staff's very strong, evidence-based understanding of their needs and how these needs develop over time. The leadership team understand very well the importance of ensuring that staff's knowledge of individual children's needs is based not only on daily interactions but on robust evidence, collected very regularly. This evidence includes very frequent evaluation and analysis of children and young people's wellbeing over time. This evidence also includes frequent, well-planned discussion and analysis of learners' circumstances, progress and a range of other factors, gathered through children and young people's self-evaluations and detailed tracking by staff. This ongoing information allows staff to monitor changes in individuals' wellbeing across a range of characteristics and identify trends in wellbeing outcomes. Commendably, the leadership team are committed to ensuring that engagement in wellbeing self-evaluation activities remains meaningful for children and young people and therefore produces worthwhile results. As a result, the universal approach to support for children and young people has become a very effective and highly individualised programme of support and intervention, as required. The leadership team use wellbeing information very responsively to consider individual, class and whole-school interventions and actions to support wellbeing. For example, in acting swiftly to deal with social falling outs, identifying cohorts who would benefit from learning more about gender equality and ongoing individualised support and intervention. This

approach to supporting and improving children and young people's wellbeing on an individual and evidence-based basis is highly effective and a major strength of the work of the school.

- All staff ensure that the promotion of wellbeing is central to the daily life of the school. This is supported very effectively by a shared understanding of wellbeing and the wellbeing indicators by almost all children and young people. This supports children very well to identify and discuss confidently their wellbeing needs. Staff use this information responsively and robustly to plan and implement highly effective interventions, often individually, to support children and young people's wellbeing. Almost all staff and young people share a strong understanding of the wellbeing indicators. As a result, most children and young people identify very well their own wellbeing needs and speak confidently about how to support them, such as improving their physical activity.
- Almost all children and young people feel safe in school and say that the school helps them to feel safe. Staff share a very strong understanding of particular challenges to safety which may impact children and young people in their island context and act effectively to deal with them. For example, staff identified specific issues around online safety and engaged effectively with children and young people as well as parents to support families with this.
- Children and young people benefit from extensive opportunities to be healthy and active within and outwith school. For example, children and young people engage regularly in activities such as football and athletics. Staff used their knowledge of children and young people's wellbeing to identify issues around lack of sleep and worked very effectively with parents to support their knowledge of healthy sleeping patterns for children and young people. Staff are very adept at identifying specific trends or issues among children and young people and intervening accordingly.
- Staff deliver high-quality learning experiences in health and wellbeing lessons which support children effectively in primary classes. For example, children successfully learn about emotional resilience and physical activity. Young people in secondary classes benefit from a progressive and well-designed personal and social education (PSE) programme which is delivered in PSE and in other classes across the curriculum. This programme has a clear rationale and benefits from regular reviews to ensure and increase its relevance. Staff link this learning explicitly with the school's values to be 'ready' for life beyond the school and beyond the island as well as being respectful and safe. This includes preparing young people for their S5 and S6 experiences at another school elsewhere in the local authority. This experience involves staying away from home in halls on another island, so staff focus successfully on developing young people's resilience, independence and life skills for this. This programme supports young people to make decisions which positively impact their wellbeing. Staff should continue to involve children and young people in making choices around what they will learn in health and wellbeing and PSE.
- Children and young people are supported very effectively with well-planned and supported transitions as they move through the school. This includes moving from nursery to primary, from primary to secondary and to pathways after S4. Children and young people are supported well in this by staff viewing the different stages of the school as one single school. This well planned and joined-up approach is an important element of the very successful ongoing support for learners as they move through their time in school. Staff also work very well to prepare young people to transition to a different school for S5 and S6. These approaches help children and young people to relieve possible anxieties and prepare well for

the next stage in their learning. Children and young people joining the school are also welcomed and benefit from swift yet meaningful work by the leadership team to get to know newly arrived learners and their families so that they can benefit from the same levels of high-quality support as children and young people already in attendance.

- Staff fulfil their statutory duties in relation to wellbeing, equality and inclusion very well. Staff are aware of their roles and are proactive in supporting all children and young people. Staff have a relentless focus to ensure that they are getting it right for every child.
- Staff identify the needs of children and young people who require additional support very effectively. Staff create profiles to support learners which are bespoke, effective, include measurable targets and are reviewed regularly. These inform staff very well to provide robustly planned and targeted support which is very individualised and of a high quality. As a result, almost all children and young people who require additional support with their learning make good progress in their learning.
- Staff work exceptionally creatively and successfully to meet the needs of children and young people. This includes learners with complex needs. Staff's approaches to meet the needs of all is particularly important in the context of being in a small school in a remote location without access to specialist educational provision or local in-person services. Most teachers have successfully developed inclusive classroom environments and approaches. They should continue to develop this work, including across all subjects in the secondary stages.
- Staff have supported the few young people who stay on beyond S4 into S5 and S6 well with bespoke timetables and ensured that they have achieved well in their personalised programmes of learning.
- Staff take positive action to support identified groups of young people who may have barriers to their learning, such as care-experienced children and young people. The leadership team plan for and monitor different aspects of children and young people's circumstances through their vulnerability tracker and supported by highly individualised approaches to support learners with planning and interventions. Staff use this information very well. For example, children and young people who are care experienced are supported very effectively. The leadership team monitor effectively the progress of these children and young people and consider appropriate interventions. All care experienced young people are considered for a coordinated support plan.
- The leadership team track and monitor progress and wellbeing robustly across the school for identified groups of children and young people. This constant, ongoing process helps staff evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and supports, alter them accordingly and undertake additional actions if required. This robust and highly individualised approach is effective in leading to improvements in attainment, attendance and participation for learners.
- As a result of positive relationships with staff, almost all children who say they have experienced bullying feel that the school deals well with this. Staff should now consider how they can develop further children, young people's and families' understanding of definitions and actions around bullying to further improve learners' shared understanding and help identify potentially otherwise hidden instances of bullying.

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children and young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school meals provider.
- Almost all children and young people feel that the school helps them to understand and respect other people. The leadership team have identified the importance of children and young people learning about different life experiences within the island community and also readying them for greater diversity beyond the island. Staff plan for and engage learners very effectively with this aim. For example, children and young people benefit from very successful and insightful learning experiences around neurodivergence and disability. This learning includes children and young people sharing their own personal experiences with the wider school. These approaches have been highly effective in helping to develop empathy, knowledge and understanding among children and young people. As planned, the leadership team should continue to develop opportunities for children and young people to develop further their understanding of equality across different life experiences and protected characteristics. To support this, staff should work together to establish a strategic overview of extensive work already undertaken on this across the school. A more planned and strategic approach should support children and young people to develop further existing learning about issues such as sexism, racism and challenging prejudice. Such a strategic overview should help develop this learning further to the same very high quality and high profile as very impactful work on learning about neurodivergence and disability.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- At the time of the inspection, the school roll comprised of small cohorts of children and young people at all stages. Because of this profile, attainment and progress in primary stages is expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels. Care also has to be taken when interpreting and analysing data in secondary stages due to small cohorts of young people and that the school only presents young people for qualifications up to and including S4. This is to ensure the identity of individuals is not disclosed.

Primary stages

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. Most children are on track to achieve national expectations in literacy and numeracy. A few children are working beyond national expectations. Almost all children who require additional support with their learning are making appropriate progress with their current targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Children engage positively and listen respectfully to adults and their peers. Younger children work well with their peers in small groups, sharing ideas to make decisions during their play. Younger children are developing their vocabulary well and use interesting describing words during group discussions. Older children listen very well during class discussions. They contribute thoughtful and relevant opinions during discussion work. They discuss confidently how they use their listening and talking skills during class tasks and presentations. Children should now apply their skills progressively across the curriculum.

Reading

- Younger children sound out simple words and sentences to read a story. They use picture clues and phonic strategies to have a go with unfamiliar words. Older children explain clearly the difference between fiction and non-fiction and can give examples of when they would use these texts. They read confidently and fluently unfamiliar and subject specific vocabulary, using expression to engage their audience. Children discuss their favourite authors and give reasons for their choice. Children need to strengthen their understanding of the key features of different genres.

Writing

- Younger children are developing well their use of sounds and blends to write simple words. They use a capital letter and full stop accurately when writing a sentence and are developing accurate formation of letters. Older children use a range of punctuation to enhance their writing appropriate to the genre. They use well ambitious vocabulary to enhance their texts. Older children now need to improve their skills in writing at length, including across the curriculum.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children's progress in numeracy and mathematics is good.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children develop well their understanding of numbers and the value of each digit appropriate to their stage of development. They order numbers accurately and are developing strategies to add and subtract appropriately challenging numbers. Older children are confident reading, writing and ordering numbers, including decimals. They develop their understanding of fractions, decimals and percentages well as they progress through the school. Older children have regular opportunities to practice and revisit key numeracy concepts. Children should be supported to develop their numeracy skills further and to apply their knowledge in more challenging problem solving contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children identify a few two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. They sort some objects based on their properties, for example, those that are flat or round. Older children name 2D shapes and state properties of 3D objects such as edges, vertices and corners. Older children use coordinate notation to plot and record the location of a point, in four quadrants and apply this in real life activities. Older children would benefit from more practice in using specific vocabulary to describe the properties of a circle such as circumference, radius and diameter.

Information handling

- Older children use tally marks to collect data, create surveys and display information in bar graphs, simple pie charts and tables. Older children create frequency tables and collate data on spreadsheets. They display information on different graphs including pie charts. Teachers should expand further opportunities for children to use and analyse information across the curriculum.

Secondary stages

Broad General Education (BGE)

- Most young people between 2021/22 and 2024/25 achieved CfE third level or better in literacy and in numeracy by the end of S3. Between 2021/22 and 2024/25, the majority of young people generally achieved CfE fourth level in literacy and in numeracy by the end of S3. Almost all young people who require additional support with their learning are making appropriate progress with their current targets.
- Teachers have undertaken work on sharing standards on approaches to literacy, especially writing, across all curricular areas. Teachers should now consider how to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach and how best it aligns with young people's prior learning in

primary classes. Teachers should also consider how such approaches may also be useful for numeracy.

S4

- In S4, all young people achieved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy in 2024/25. All young people achieved SCQF level 4 or better and a minority at level 5 or better in numeracy in 2024/25. This attainment in literacy and numeracy has remained generally in line with virtual comparator (VC) between 2020/21 and 2024/25.

Attainment over time

Attendance

- Attendance at school for children and young people in both primary and secondary classes is consistently above national average. Only a few children and young people have absence rates of 10% or more. These are primarily due to family holidays, on which staff engage constructively with parents to emphasise the importance of attendance. Staff have undertaken approaches to further improve attendance and reduce late coming.

Primary stages

- The leadership team have developed effective systems to track progress and attainment of all children and young people, in all curriculum areas. They meet with teachers to monitor the progress of children and young people in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing at key points across the school year. All children are discussed and for children not on track to meet national expectations, interventions are identified. Staff can show individual children making good progress in their learning.

Secondary stages

BGE

- As young people move into S1, teachers track their progress through all curricular areas. The leadership team work very well with teachers to consider the evidence of young people's attainment across all curricular areas, especially as they progress from primary and eventually into senior phase.

Senior Phase

Improving attainment for all

S4

- In S4, when compared using complementary tariff points, attainment for the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people generally fluctuates over time, due to the small numbers of young people at the school. Attainment for the highest attaining 20% of young people improves between 2021/22 and 2024/25. Attainment for all young people in S4 remains in line with VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25.

Breadth and depth

- In 2024/25, no young people were dual presented for National 4 and National 5 courses.
- At S4, the majority of young people generally achieved five or more awards at SCQF level 5C or better between 2020/21 and 2024/25. A minority of young people have achieved three or more awards at SCQF level 5A or better between 2022/23 and 2024/25. Young people's attainment across all SCQF measures in S4 between 2020/21 and 2024/25 has been in line with

VC. Attainment in wider SCQF courses provides improved attainment for individual young people, as appropriate, at SCQF levels 3 or better and 4 or better. As planned, the leadership team and teachers should continue to explore how young people's outcomes may be improved further by use of such courses, as appropriate.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- All children and young people benefit from a well embedded culture of achievement. Staff work closely with parents, community partners and local businesses to contribute to this offer. Almost all children and young people value taking part in local cultural events that celebrate the history and traditions of Shetland, such as Up Helly Aa, Shetland Schools Music Festival and the Unst Show. They contribute well to whole school initiatives such as art exhibition, bridge building competition and 'Redd Ups' and take part in netball and football leagues. Young people succeed locally and nationally through these, particularly in sports. They enjoy taking responsibility and are developing confidence, communication skills, leadership abilities and a strong understanding of their local context and culture.
- Almost all children and young people undertake leadership roles, such as reading and sports ambassadors, contributing effectively to school and community initiatives. Most learners develop important skills including teamwork, communication, enterprise and resilience. Children in the primary stages are supported well to identify and describe the meta-skills they are developing and their next steps. A next step is to extend this approach further in the secondary stages to help young people articulate their skills development more consistently.
- The school community celebrates the achievements of individual children and young people very well through a range of valued approaches. These include individual tracking folders, wall displays, digital platforms and annual celebration events. Subject specific achievements include the 'Golden Joystick', 'artists of the year' and the dux medal. This helps children and young people feel valued and motivated to achieve further success.
- Young people benefit from formal accreditation including Bikeability, Skills for Work courses, the music festival and other courses at SCQF level 4. For example, all young people in S2 complete a Sports Leaders Award and Saltire Award. School staff and partners should continue to explore more programmes and activities that can be accredited. This may help to increase formal recognition of children and young people's volunteering and achievements across the school and the local community.

Equity for all learners

- The leadership team and staff are committed to ensuring equity for all children and young people. There is a strong focus on reducing potential barriers to success, achievement and participation which the remote context of Unst may present. The increased opportunities are providing all children and young people with rich experiences which are developing their skills for learning, life and work and broadening their experiences.
- All staff have a clear and in-depth understanding of the socio-economic background of children and their families. They understand the challenges faced by families living remotely in Unst and recognise barriers to learning caused by economic disadvantage. To address these barriers, staff work well with partners and each other to ensure a strong universal offer of support for families. For example, subsidised school trips.

- The leadership team have used PEF funds to put in place helpful offers of universal support to promote equity. For example, a well-attended PEF funded breakfast club helps to minimise financial pressures, reflecting the increased cost of living on Unst. The headteacher has been able to successfully increase support staff's time in school. This enables staff to plan closely with teachers beyond the school day which results in children and young people receiving high-quality and seamless support throughout the day.
- Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, almost all young people continued their education in S5 and S6 at another secondary school in the area. A few young people left the school to a positive initial post-school destination.

Practice worth sharing more widely

I: Highly effective approaches to implementing play pedagogy across the school

Staff have implemented an effective and well-considered approach to play in primary stages. Developed over a number of years, staff worked collaboratively to transform learning environments in the primary to ensure children had access to quality spaces for play and exploration. Staff have developed a robust play strategy to ensure children in primary experience learning which is playful, sparks curiosity and supports them to explore, adapt and create.

Successful approaches to implement play include:-

Staff have undertaken a range of successful approaches to implement play. Professional learning has deepened staff's understanding of high-quality play. Staff have a shared understanding of their role as the adult in facilitating and promoting playful experiences at different ages and stages. Staff in the working group have managed the pace of change very well to support all staff to understand the power of quality play experiences.

Staff have created engaging environments supported by open-ended resources and provocations which engage children and young people and match well to their stage of learning. They provide a balance of playful learning and free play experiences which promotes curiosity, creativity and critical thinking skills.

Children in primary classes sustain their engagement in their play, testing and adapting their designs and models. They work collaboratively with their peers displaying strong communication and negotiation skills.

Staff have delivered information sessions for parents to support them to understand the skills their child develops as a result of their play experiences.

Staff have also shared their play journey to support system wide improvement beyond their island and local authority through delivering online training for colleagues across Scotland.

II: Creative and innovative use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI), to enhance learning and promote learner independence

Staff and learners have used a range of digital tools to increase engagement, deepen understanding, and to develop further links between learners in different stages across the school. Staff encourage groups in upper primary and secondary classes to be creative with digital technologies. Staff have been exceptionally creative, collaborative and forward-thinking in seeking to equip learners with independent skills in this area to meet challenges and opportunities of the modern world.

These rich learning experiences promote independent thought, creativity and strengthen further the relationships between learners throughout the school.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard HMIE 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.

On behalf of the Office of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland