Item: 8

Education, Communities and Housing Committee: 11 November 2026.
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland – Stromness Academy.
Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

1.1. This report presents His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland's letter on the follow-up inspection of Stromness Academy, for members' information.

1.2. In June 2026, Education Scotland undertook a follow-up inspection of Stromness Academy to review progress made against the areas for improvement identified during the inspection in March 2025.

1.3. The follow-up inspection found that the school had made progress in each of the four areas identified in March 2025. Inspectors noted the following:

- Strategic leadership had improved through clearer leadership responsibilities, stronger improvement planning and more effective quality assurance arrangements.
- The quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment had improved, with more consistent classroom routines and increased opportunities for staff to work together to develop practice.
- Teachers were applying national standards more consistently, supported by improved moderation activities and a wider range of assessment approaches.
- Arrangements for monitoring, tracking and reviewing young people's progress had been strengthened, providing senior and middle leaders with a clearer overview of attainment across the school.
- While positive progress had been made, inspectors concluded that further work was required to ensure these improvements were fully embedded and led to consistently improved outcomes for all young people.

1.4. Inspectors also reviewed progress in relation to safeguarding arrangements. While noting improvements in a number of areas, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland identified a small number of remaining actions relating to the consistency of safeguarding procedures and aspects of health, safety and

medication management. These matters were being addressed by the school and the Education Service as part of ongoing improvement activity.

1.5. The inspection also identified a number of areas which will continue to be priorities for the school and the Education Service. These include:

- Continuing to develop the role of middle leaders so that improvements are implemented consistently across all departments.
- Using quality assurance processes more effectively to evaluate the impact of improvement activity on learning, teaching and attainment.
- Increasing the pace and level of challenge within lessons so that learning better meets the needs of all young people, including those requiring additional support or greater challenge.
- Developing teachers' use of assessment information to plan learning more effectively and to identify appropriate next steps for individual learners.
- Continuing to strengthen staff confidence in using attainment and tracking information to identify learners requiring additional support or challenge and to inform targeted interventions.
- Ensuring that recent improvements become fully established and are reflected in improved outcomes for young people over time.

1.6. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland concluded that Stromness Academy had made progress across all four areas for improvement identified at the original inspection, whilst recognising that further improvement is still required in each area.

1.7. The improvement work identified through the follow-up inspection will continue to be supported by the Education Service as part of its ongoing programme of school improvement and quality assurance.

1.8. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland will carry out a further inspection within one year of the publication of the inspection findings.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:

i. Note the inspection letter in respect of Stromness Academy issued by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland on 15 September 2026, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

For Further Information please contact:

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Implications of Report

1. **Financial** – Not applicable.
2. **Legal** – Not applicable.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – Not applicable.
5. **Equalities –** An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for performance reporting.
6. **Island Communities Impact –** An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required for performance reporting.
7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
   ☒Growing our economy.
   ☒Strengthening our Communities.
   ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
   ☐ Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
   ☒Cost of Living.
   ☒Sustainable Development.
   ☒Local Equality.
   ☐ Improving Population Health.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.
10. **Risk** – Not applicable.
11. **Procurement** – Not applicable.
12. **Health and Safety** – Not applicable.
13. **Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
14. **Information Technology** – Not applicable.
15. **Cost of Living** – Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee of 3 June 2025 – Education Scotland Inspection – Stromness Academy

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Inspection Letter from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland.

HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

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.

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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 challenged 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.

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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.

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Graham Parry
HM Inspector

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

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