



**Donaldson's School and
Nursery Class
Linlithgow**

25 August 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 and young people. We also comment on how well staff and children and young people 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 and young people 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 and carers who are relatives or friends.

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1. The school

Donaldson's School is a non-denominational, grant aided residential school. It provides education for children and young people aged two and a half to 18 years who are deaf* or have severe speech and language difficulties. A significant number of children and young people have other additional support needs. British Sign Language (BSL) is the first language for many children and young people. The school is situated in Linlithgow, West Lothian. At the time of the inspection, there were 59 children and young people including five in the nursery. Care is provided as required for up to four nights per week. Pupils' attendance was in line with the national average in 2007/2008.

2. Particular strengths of the school

- The quality of learning experiences in the nursery class.
- The quality of support for children and young people from the team, including the educational audiologist, the speech and language therapists, the deaf studies department and through the *Hungry for Success* initiative.
- The impact of the high quality new building on children and young people's learning and care.
- Coordinated approaches to identifying and meeting the learning and communication needs of each learner.
- Leadership across learning, and the involvement of staff in improving the school.

* Deaf includes deaf, deafened and hard of hearing

3. Examples of good practice

- Interactive learning in the nursery class.
- Developing vocabulary in English and British Sign Language (BSL) for deaf children.
- Supporting children and young people at transition.

4. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Learning and achievement

Children in the nursery class are highly motivated, enthusiastic and enjoy their learning. They concentrate well on their chosen activities and play well by themselves and with each other. Nursery staff skilfully involve children in planning activities, based on children's interests. Across the primary and secondary classes, most children and young people are motivated and make progress in their learning. Teachers need to continue to challenge children and young people with very good communication and learning skills. Staff use the school's excellent facilities very well to improve learning experiences. Young people in the life skills class make very good progress in developing the skills they will need when they leave school.

In the nursery class, children learn new skills and develop confidence through exploring the local community. Children and young people at the primary and secondary stages are developing confidence and communication skills through opportunities in school such as the Busy Bee café, the Eco-schools Scotland group, work experience in the school kitchen and enterprise activities. Staff, including care staff, make a significant contribution to developing young people's self esteem. Individual young people have achieved well in the local

community drama club and in sporting activities. The school is finding more ways for children and young people to use local amenities such as the canal and the golf club. The school intends to build on this by extending the range of awards which recognise children and young people's achievements.

In the nursery class, children are making very good progress in developing skills to help them communicate and begin reading and writing. Children who started in the nursery class with very little communication are now confident and developing well in all aspects of communication. At the primary stages, most children are making good progress in developing communication skills. Deaf children who use BSL are developing well with help from deaf studies staff. A few children who have more complex communication difficulties have not yet made sufficient progress in using alternative means of communication, such as pictures and symbols. Although a few children at primary stages are making progress in reading and writing, staff need to continue to monitor individual progress more closely, and focus on improving children's skills in these areas. Children's progress in mathematics at the primary stages is improving. Higher attaining children at the primary stages could achieve more in their mathematics and numeracy. In the secondary department, most young people make good progress from their prior levels of achievement in English and mathematics. They attain well in a range of subjects in National Qualifications (NQs). Overall, performance in NQs is improving. More young people are going to college after school, and successfully completing their college placements. Across the school, children and young people are achieving well in art, music, information and communications technology (ICT), home economics and physical education.

Curriculum and meeting learning needs

The nursery curriculum provides a broad range of enjoyable learning activities in a very rich learning environment. Staff provide very good activities which meet individual needs and interests. At the primary stages, children experience a suitable range of activities, with an

emphasis on developing communication and literacy. In some primary classes, teachers provide very interesting and motivating experiences for children. However, all teachers do not build sufficiently on the very good experiences in the nursery. At times, tasks and activities are not appropriate to meet the needs of children on the autistic spectrum. Teachers in the primary and nursery classes need to work together to share and build on best practice. At the secondary stages, staff provide a broad range of courses at different levels which meet the needs of learners. Staff ensure that all young people can follow courses which interest them and meet their needs. Across the school, staff are making very good progress in taking forward the national initiative, *Curriculum for Excellence*. They now need to build on this work to help children and young people make connections between areas of learning. The school works very well with partner agencies to help young people transfer between primary and secondary and on to further and higher education.

In the nursery class, staff meet children's learning, emotional and social needs very well. They observe children carefully, develop individual profiles and provide activities appropriate to their needs. Across the primary and secondary stages, most tasks and activities are well matched to learners' needs. Staff know children and young people well, and adapt their teaching approaches to meet their changing needs. However, in a few primary classes, tasks and activities are not sufficiently well planned. Staff provide suitable activities for homework, and residential staff support home learning very well. Parents and young people are involved in setting learning targets and reviewing progress. The school's audiologist ensures that every young person's audiological needs are fully met. Staff from the deaf studies department support children and young people's communication needs very effectively .

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

Staff from different professions work very well together to help children and young people to learn. Together they develop a 'communication profile' for each child. This profile ensures that all staff work together to improve communication and learning, and ensure learners follow what is being said in classes. Parents attend regular meetings to review their child's progress. They value the detailed reports they receive about their child and the regular newsletters about the work of the school. The management team are working closely with the Parents' Forum to find ways of involving parents more in the life and work of the school. The school deals thoroughly and effectively with complaints.

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

Staff take account of the views of children and young people on a regular basis in lessons and in the residences. Children and young people's views influence the life of the school, particularly the activities available in the evenings, the menus at lunch time and lunch club activities. The Pupil Council has brought about changes suggested by children and young people. In recent years, staff have become much more actively involved in reviewing the work they do and planning for improvement. They review their lessons, and take account of the views of their pupils. All staff have worked effectively together on an improvement plan and achieved improvements to the curriculum and learning and teaching.

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

Relationships between staff and children and young people are trusting and supportive. Deaf staff are a positive influence on young

people. Overall, children and young people's behaviour and their attitudes to learning are positive. Staff need to continue working together to respond consistently to individual children who need more support to behave appropriately. All staff understand their responsibilities for children in need of care and protection. They respond sensitively to children's concerns. The school is developing positive attitudes in children and young people to healthy eating and physical exercise. The school chef makes a very effective contribution through the provision of high quality, healthy meals. He actively involves children and young people in food preparation.

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

The school community has worked together to develop an appropriate vision for the school. The principal supported by the governors successfully has set out a business plan for taking forward the school and the wider function of Donaldson's Trust nationally. The headteacher has had a very positive impact in her two years in post. She and the depute headteacher have successfully developed strong team work and a commitment to improvement across the school. They have raised expectations and improved standards across the school. They have successfully involved staff in evaluating the quality of their work and planning for improvement. As a result more staff are taking on leadership roles and improving learners' experiences. The head of care continues to support residential staff effectively and ensure the quality of care. The school is very well placed to build on recent improvements and further improve provision for children and young people.

9. What happens next?

As a result of the very good quality of education provided by the school, we will make no further visits following this inspection. The Governing body will inform parents about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the schools.

We have agreed the following area for improvement with the school and Governing body.

- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*, with a particular focus on wider achievement across the school and residences.

At the last Care Commission inspection of the nursery class there were no requirements and one recommendations which has been fully addressed.

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 Donaldson's School and Nursery Class.

Primary and secondary school

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

Nursery class

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

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

The curriculum	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	very good

Christine Knight
HM Inspector

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Care Commission Officer

25 August 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