

29 August 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

**Donaldson's
Linlithgow**

In December 2013, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Board of Governors. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in September 2016. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and 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 children's/young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Improve the leadership team's capacity to lead learning and manage the day-to-day operation of the school.

The permanent appointment of a headteacher has provided stronger and more effective leadership. This has allowed the school to take forward the key areas for improvement identified by HM Inspectors in 2016 with appropriate pace and challenge. Importantly, the headteacher has built staff confidence and trust and created a team which is more reflective. Staff work together more closely to think about learning and how it can be improved and developed. The leadership team have used the challenge questions from *How Good is Our School? 4* well to reflect on their performance as a team and identify next steps in improvement. Roles and responsibilities of the leadership team to lead learning are now much clearer. Professional learning for the leadership team has increased their confidence and capacity for improvement. The headteacher and leadership team are aware of the need to now focus on improving assessment, tracking and monitoring processes to enable staff to measure children's progress more robustly.

Implement a robust quality improvement framework.

The headteacher and Chief Executive Officer, supported by the trustees, have made good progress in improving quality assurance across the school. Staff now have a better understanding of the purpose of self-evaluation for improvement. The Board of Trustees have recently reviewed their governance structure to reflect the changing needs of the school. Following this review, a Quality and Practice Improvement Committee has been introduced with a clear focus on improvement. The school have re-written their self-evaluation policy to take account of staff feedback. The

new policy helpfully takes account of national guidance to inform a framework for self-evaluation activities going forward. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) 2016-2017 has addressed the key areas for improvement identified by HM Inspectors in September 2016. Almost all improvement actions have been fully or partially met. The SIP provides an effective framework for monitoring and tracking progress with appropriate timescales and lead responsibilities identified. The school is aware of the need to engage staff more in developing the SIP for next session. Staff have benefited from training in quality assurance and are now much more reflective about their practice and keen to discuss learning with each other. Views obtained from staff and other stakeholders has been used well to inform future planning and in identifying appropriate areas for improvement. The headteacher is aware of the need to build on the progress made to fully embed self-evaluation across all areas of practice within the school.

Further improve staff's skills to meet the needs of the children and young people now attending the school and ensure that the communication needs of the deaf continue to be met.

The school has continued to strengthen staff knowledge and skills about learning and teaching, particularly for children and young people with significant and complex learning needs. Children and young people are benefitting from the support given by staff to encourage emotional wellbeing. Staff are sensitive to the needs of the children and young people in their care and deal effectively with challenging behaviour. The school now need to look at developing children's and young people's literacy and numeracy skills further and to link these skills with other subject areas. Almost all children and young people are engaged and motivated to learn in class. Staff are using more appropriate learning activities and teaching approaches to meet the needs of children and young people. They should now look at appropriate accreditation of children's and young people's learning. Staff are more confident in sharing their practice expertise across the team and this is ensuring better support for children and young people. The communication approaches to working with children and young people are appropriate, with more emphasis on alternatives such as signing and the use of visual cues. Such approaches should be developed and used further.

Continue to improve transition arrangements for all children and young people, particularly post-school transitions.

The school has made progress in developing a clear transition strategy for children and young people joining the service and for those moving on into other provisions and post-school destinations. In particular, the recently developed *Person Centred Planning* approach has the potential to improve educational outcomes for children and young people further. The school is implementing a successful work placement programme. This programme is helping to build confidence in young people and is developing skills for learning, life and work. The school is aware of the need to develop transitions from class to class and activity to activity better.

Further develop the curriculum to ensure progression, depth and challenge.

The school has made progress in this area but is aware that more is required. Staff are working well together to review and design the curriculum in line with national policy. They have started to deepen their knowledge and skills on how to plan the curriculum following recent training sessions. This has included how to use the Curriculum for Excellence benchmarks and experiences and outcomes to assess learners' progress. Children's and young people's learning journals have the potential to provide robust information about their learning experiences and what they have achieved. During 2016 there has been a focus on embedding health and wellbeing and literacy across learning. Commendably, staff have developed a health and wellbeing course which is relevant to the lives of its learners and takes account of the needs of individuals. Learning covers the areas of physical education, safety, emotional literacy, personal hygiene and sexual health and relationships. The school is aware of the need to develop shared high expectations of literacy and numeracy standards across all aspects of the curriculum. The school should continue to develop the curriculum to cover all subject areas and ensure that children and young people are challenged, have opportunities for using their learning across all areas of their life and are given more choice about what they learn.

What happens next?

The school has made significant progress since the original inspection. We are satisfied that most of the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As such our Lead Officer for Special Grant-Aided Schools will work with the school to continue to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. The Board of Governors will inform parents of the extent to which the school has improved within nine months of publication of this letter.

Dr Laura-Ann Currie
HM Inspector

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