

17 September 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In August 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Tarbat Old Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Highland Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children 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 learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Across the school and nursery, develop leadership opportunities for all staff and children.

Opportunities for leadership for all staff and children have improved. All staff say they are empowered to lead their chosen area and feel trusted and supported by the acting headteacher to do so.

In the nursery, all children are developing their leadership skills well as they increase their independence through a range of activities. For example, they set the table for lunch and participate in community events with older children successfully, such as the litter pick on Portmahomack beach.

All children in the school now have a range of leadership roles which they are proud of and fulfil successfully. For example, the newly formed pupil council asked all parents, staff and children for their views about the school values. They developed the 'TOPS' acronym to help everyone to know and understand the values of talented, responsible learners, outstanding kindness, positivity to succeed and supporting inclusion. All staff and children demonstrate these values effectively at all times. This is leading to a positive ethos across the school where children work hard and respect each other and adults.

In the nursery, practitioners take responsibility for leading improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing effectively. As a result, all children benefit from playing and learning in a literacy and numeracy-rich environment. Practitioners have developed a regular story of the week focus and children enjoy participating in real and meaningful activities linked to each story. For example, children are beginning to recall and retell familiar stories effectively through role play and interactive play activities. Practitioners introduced 'Shanarri' the toy spider as a key member of the setting. Children use the spider successfully to talk about their wellbeing with practitioners. Children in the nursery now have a greater understanding of the wellbeing indicators and what they mean to them.

In the school, teachers and support staff have led the development of play-based learning and teaching and safe play in the playground skilfully. They have developed strategies to teach reading effectively. For example, all children in P1-3 now learn in an attractive environment designed for play-based learning. They have a range of meaningful opportunities to develop their skills of creativity, curiosity and inquiry as they play and learn.

Improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the nursery. In doing so, it will be important for all staff to have a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching.

The quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the nursery has improved.

Practitioners are developing a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching through engaging fully in robust and regular professional learning. The acting headteacher and local authority representatives have supported practitioners very effectively to make well-judged improvements to learning, teaching and assessment.

Practitioners have worked closely with health colleagues to develop their interactions to support the development of children's vocabulary. Practitioners now ask a better balance of questions which extend children's learning. They have a strong focus on giving children time and space to be creative and curious in their play and learning. Practitioners extend children's vocabulary well. As a result, all children are making good progress in their learning and development.

All practitioners make increasingly careful observations of children's learning. They focus on the skills children are developing and record these well in children's individual learning journals. They use the information they gather through observations to identify a learning target for all children regularly. They should now involve children more in setting a few targets at a time.

Practitioners reviewed the indoor and outdoor environments. They identified a need for more opportunities for children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in the playroom and outdoors. They provided resources such as clipboards, pencils and displays of numerals in almost all areas of the playroom and outdoors. Children enjoy direct access to the attractive outdoor area and are developing their gross motor skills well as they run, jump and climb. All children now benefit from well-planned, regular opportunities to learn using digital technology, such as laptop computers and programmable toys.

Develop further approaches to checking children's progress across the nursery and school to raise attainment of all children.

Approaches to checking children's progress across the nursery and school to raise attainment of all children have improved.

The acting headteacher has developed robust processes for tracking the attainment and achievement of all children across the school and nursery. She meets practitioners and staff termly to discuss the progress and attainment of all children. In the nursery, staff track children's progress against local authority developmental milestones effectively. In the school, staff track children's progress in literacy and numeracy well. Together, staff identify gaps in children's learning and provide appropriate targeted support. Staff say the information gathered in these tracking meetings helps them to ensure they plan learning experiences which best meet the needs of all individuals. The acting headteacher should now develop the tracking of children's progress across all areas of the curriculum.

In the school, teachers are at the early stages of tracking the skills children are developing through their wider achievement activities in and out of school. Teachers discuss and record children's participation in achievement activities at the regular tracking meetings. They use a skills progression framework to track children's skills successfully.

Across the school and nursery, staff should develop further the planning of learning experiences across all areas of the curriculum to ensure all children build on their prior learning.

Approaches to planning children's learning experiences across the curriculum are beginning to improve across the school and nursery.

In the nursery, practitioners plan learning which is highly responsive to children's needs and interests. They are beginning to ask children what they already know about their chosen context and what they would like to learn more about. They record this well in mind-maps in learning floorbooks. Practitioners plan a range of activities for children effectively. They need to ensure there is a better balance of child-led and adult-initiated activities. Practitioners should also ensure that children consistently experience a more broad and balanced curriculum.

In the school, teachers plan learning which meets the needs of all children. Together with the headteacher, they identify gaps in children's learning and plan next steps in literacy and numeracy for all children. They record which experiences and outcomes children are covering in all other areas of the curriculum. Teachers need to ensure that all children make good progress in their learning across the whole curriculum and build on prior learning.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress within one year of the inspection. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit. When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with The Highland Council, that we intend to take.

Katharine Crombie
HM Inspector