Dear Parent/Carer

Cornbank St James' Primary School and Nursery Class
Midlothian Council

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child’s school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school’s successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school’s recent work, including the school’s pastoral arrangements for children moving from nursery to P1 and through to P7. We also looked at the arrangements for children and staff to take on roles of responsibility. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children’s education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the nursery and primary stages, children engage enthusiastically in a range of activities and enjoy their learning. In the nursery, children are settled and happy and are becoming increasingly confident. They work well with each other, discuss their ideas and plans and regularly share resources. Children were fascinated as they hunted for insects and bugs in the woods and used the mud kitchen. Nursery staff should increase children’s independence skills more, for example allowing them to select resources and materials from a wider choice. In the primary classes, children contribute to lessons and discussions confidently and in some lessons they are leading the learning. They are well behaved and motivated to learn. They work well in pairs and groups, sharing tasks and helping each other. For example, P5 children used djembes and doum-doum drums successfully to tell the story of The Unsinkable Ship. Children have learning targets which help them focus on their work. We have asked the school to ensure that the targets are more relevant and demanding and that the feedback given to children helps them to progress further. In some lessons, children are taking responsibility for their own learning and are well focused when working independently. For example, children in P2 organised their own resources and P6 used ICT effectively for research. Staff use a range of creative teaching strategies to make learning more exciting and stimulating in some areas of the curriculum. Children need to have more high-quality learning experiences across all areas of their learning.

Across the nursery and primary stages, children are achieving well. In the nursery, children enjoyed making candle holders for an enterprise activity for a local charity. In the nursery, children are making good progress in developing early literacy and numeracy skills. They are able to recognise their own names and to count and write.
numbers during their play. Staff should continue to develop children’s literacy and numeracy skills inside and outside the nursery. At the primary stages, children participate successfully in a range of sporting, musical and community activities. For example, the school has gained its fourth Eco-Schools Scotland green flag. Children are taking on roles of responsibility throughout the school, for example as members of the pupil council and as Eco Warriors. At the primary stages, children are making satisfactory progress in English language overall. From P1 to P4, children are making good progress and the school needs to build on this strong start at the later stages. Whilst children read and write well, they could be challenged more to ensure they develop their skills to the highest level possible. Children are making good progress in mathematics. They develop their numeracy skills by regular practice of multiplication tables and number work. In almost all classes, they develop these skills in engaging activities and can relate them to real-life contexts. Children use their literacy and numeracy skills successfully in other areas of the curriculum. For example, children in P3/4 used their literacy skills well when discussing religious festivals. Children in P7 used their numeracy skills well when they organised the Book Fair. Children use their information and communications technology skills very well to enhance their learning.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Staff work very well together to support children in their learning. Across the nursery and primary stages, they are very aware of the learning needs of children and organise a range of activities to ensure they are fully engaged. Some children need more challenging activities to extend their learning. Children requiring additional support in their learning are making good progress. The school works very closely with parents and external agencies to support the learning of these groups of children. Support staff make very positive and helpful contributions to lessons and make well-judged interventions to support children’s learning.

Across the nursery and primary stages, the curriculum is broad and balanced and provides children with a range of relevant learning experiences, and takes good account of Curriculum for Excellence. Staff and teachers are updating the curriculum regularly and involve children in planning projects. In the nursery, staff use the temporary playroom and garden effectively, planning activities that allow children to play, learn and follow their interests. At the primary stages, teachers are refreshing their ideas and developing new materials that build on children’s previous learning and develop their skills further. For example, children in P7 are learning about the techniques of Fauvism as part of their art lessons. Teachers use the local environment successfully to enhance children’s knowledge about sustainability. For example, children in P2/3 identified leaves found in their neighbouring woods and used the leaf litter to make pictures. Children are very well supported as they move from nursery to P1 and from P7 to Penicuik High School. The school should continue to work with other primary schools and Penicuik High School to develop further curricular links.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Staff are reflective practitioners and have a strong commitment to improving children’s learning experiences and their own practice. They participate regularly in a variety of professional learning opportunities in the school and across Midlothian Council to
improve their teaching approaches. The headteacher and depute headteacher undertake a range of monitoring activities, such as lesson observations and monitoring children’s work. These activities now need to focus on improving attainment and continuing to develop and support consistent, high-quality learning and teaching across the school. The headteacher and depute headteacher need to continue to build a culture of self-evaluation and further involve staff in decisions about improvements. The school needs to continue to develop more rigorous approaches to monitoring and tracking children’s attainment to ensure they attain as highly as possible. Staff should observe each other and share good practice formally to ensure that they provide high-quality learning for children. The school has recently established ‘Enquiry Groups’ which focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The headteacher needs to support staff in these groups to ensure their work has a positive impact on children’s experiences and achievement. Many parents contribute very well to the life of the school as parent helpers and organise fundraising events. The school needs to ensure that children and parents have opportunities to contribute to school improvements.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Well-behaved and motivated children who are keen to learn.
- The commitment of staff to continue to improve their practice and children’s learning experiences.
- Children’s learning experiences in the local community.
- Parents’ contribution to the life of the school.

We discussed with staff and Midlothian Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- The school should continue to develop the curriculum and ensure that it improves the quality of children’s learning experiences.
- The school should use its tracking and monitoring approaches more effectively to raise attainment.
- The school, including the nursery class, should develop further its approaches to self-evaluation, involving all stakeholders, to ensure continuous improvement in its work.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Midlothian Council will inform parents about the school’s progress.

Hakim Din
HM Inspector
Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/CornbankStJamesPrimarySchoolMidlothian.asp

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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