

17 June 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Banchory Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work and published another letter in February 2024. 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.

**Senior leaders need to work with staff across the school and nursery to provide clear, strategic leadership. This leadership should result in focused improvement priorities to improve children's progress and attainment across all areas of the curriculum. There is a need for improved communication across the school to ensure a shared understanding of expectations and standards.**

Overall, progress is beginning to be made in addressing this area for improvement. The local authority should continue to support the leadership team to improve strategic leadership across the school.

The local authority has continued to work with the headteacher to improve aspects of the school's work. The deputy headteachers have more clearly defined roles within the leadership team. This is helping them to take a lead role in improving children's experiences within the departments they lead. The deputy headteachers have worked well with staff to improve links between the nursery and the school. They have also worked well with staff to take forward improvements in the enhanced provision and in supporting children who require additional support with their learning. The headteacher should now support the deputy headteachers to build on this to have a greater influence on improvements across the whole school.

The headteacher has continued to improve communication across the school community. The weekly bulletin has improved communication between the school and parents. The information for parents is clearer, more concise and is beginning to give them time to prepare for school events. Teachers' use of the online platform to share information with parents continues to improve. As staff develop their use of the online platform, they need to ensure there is a more consistent approach to using it across the school.

The headteacher has in place a school improvement plan that outlines the main priorities for improvement. Teachers have established working groups linked to areas of the school improvement plan. They are rightly proud of their work and strengthened role in leading change within the school. However, parents and children continue to be unclear on what the current areas for improvement are. There remains a significant need for the headteacher to work with all members of the school community to develop a clearer understanding of the

school's work. She needs to help all children and parents become aware of the emerging strengths and areas where improvement is still required. Senior leaders should now review and refresh the school vision. They should work with the school community to agree an ambitious vision with a focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for all children.

**Senior leaders should establish robust approaches to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's work. There is a need for senior leaders to take greater managerial oversight of the nursery, primary stages and enhanced provision as a whole school community.**

Overall, there are increasing strengths in this area. However, senior leaders need more time to develop significant parts of this area for improvement.

Senior leaders have taken steps to improve their approaches to gathering information about the strengths and areas for development across the school. This is beginning to help them to build up a more accurate understanding of the quality of children's learning experiences. Teachers are now observing each other teaching. This is showing positive signs of supporting them to share ideas with each other. Senior leaders should build on this to strengthen further their understanding of the quality of children's learning experiences across the school. This should help them to identify areas of learning and teaching that require further support and improvement.

The deputy headteacher has worked well with teachers in primary 1 to take better account of the information shared by practitioners in the nursery when children start school. Staff across the nursery and primary 1 have developed increasingly effective ways to check the progress all children make with their learning. This is supporting teachers to plan learning that builds more effectively on what children know. There are early signs of this improving children's literacy and numeracy skills in primary 1.

The team in the enhanced provision have benefited greatly from the realignment of senior leaders' remits. The deputy headteacher is working more closely with the team. He has taken positive steps to strengthen links between the additional support for learning team, teachers in the enhanced provision and the wider school team.

The deputy headteacher has worked with staff to create an accurate overview of children who require additional support with their learning. He has also used this overview to review staff deployment and identify key areas of support for staff to lead on, for example, nurturing approaches. As a next step, senior leaders now need to review individual plans for children who receive additional support. Staff should ensure all child's plans include specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed (SMART) targets. Parents and children should be fully involved in creating plans and evaluating the progress made towards the agreed SMART targets. There remains a need to ensure all children receive the right support at the right time and make progress towards their targets.

**Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure all children receive a consistently high-quality learning experience across the school. This should include a whole school focus on assessment and achieving national standards. There is a need for a specific review of approaches to learning and teaching at early level.**

Local authority staff have continued to work with senior leaders to improve the quality of learning experiences across the school. Teachers have participated in a range of professional learning to support this work. Teachers are continuing to develop their understanding of high-quality learning and teaching. Before the last inspection, they created the 'Banchory Primary learning, teaching and assessing statement' and an 'elements of a good lesson' document. Staff should continue to use these documents to ensure all children experience high-quality learning experiences across all aspects of their learning.

In all lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. Most children work well with their peers in pairs and small groups. Teachers are beginning to provide increased opportunities for children to have a more active role in leading their learning. Almost all teachers use questioning well to check children's understanding. In most classes, teachers' questioning now needs to be developed further to support children to think more deeply about their learning. In the majority of classes, there remains a need to ensure children experience learning that is more closely matched to their needs.

Children now set and evaluate learning targets in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing termly. Children would benefit from more regular opportunities to reflect on their targets during learning. Teachers have introduced recently an agreed set of skills to develop through learning. Most teachers refer to the skills during lessons. This is supporting children well to understand the skills they are developing across their learning.

The school's assessment calendar continues to support teachers to use a broader range of summative assessments throughout the year. Teachers routinely plan assessments, in literacy and numeracy, as part of their planning of learning and teaching. Most teachers provide written and verbal feedback to children about their work. This feedback is not helping children to understand what they have done well or what their next steps in learning are. Staff should develop further their use of high-quality feedback with a clear focus on helping children to make progress in their learning.

Overall, there has been limited progress towards this area for development. Senior leaders need to support teachers to work together to improve and maintain the consistency of high-quality learning and teaching further across the school.

### What happens next?

The school has made limited progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within twelve months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeenshire 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.

Marion Carlton  
HM Inspector