

16 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Valley Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement, which we agreed with the school and Fife 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. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at <https://www.careinspectorate.com/>.

There is a need to provide clearer strategic leadership and guidance, to develop a more focused and ambitious approach to change which leads to improvements for all learners. In doing this, the senior leadership team and staff need to work together to ensure effective collaboration and teamwork.

Following the appointment of the new acting headteacher and acting senior staff leadership team the school is making significant progress. Under the exemplary leadership of the acting headteacher, essential changes to practice and important areas of work are now showing progress. Senior leaders quickly and correctly prioritised areas to support improvements as identified in the previous inspection. There is now a clear direction and plan for school improvement in place. Staff are working well together and feel better supported by senior leaders. Teachers are now taking a more active leadership role in leading improvements in the school. Teamwork has improved considerably and there is a better ethos in the school. Children are much happier in the school and are taking more responsibility towards their learning. They feel that classes are calmer and they enjoy being in school. Parents also comment positively on the improvements in communication from the school. Parents appreciate the provision of a wider range of after school clubs now in place for children.

In the two nursery classes, there remains a stable staff team. Practitioners are undertaking important leadership roles across literacy, numeracy, science, technology and the development of the 'Valley Voices' group. This is helping to improve children's access to key areas of learning and development.

The school has taken significant steps to improve the inclusion of children who attend the additional support specialist provision within mainstream classes. Staff now ensure that children have opportunities to socialise with their peers in the playground, and school events. Led by the acting depute headteacher, regular, planned meetings with teachers and support assistants ensure that all staff are involved in improvement planning and decisions about the additional support classes. Parents now feel more involved in their children's learning through more regular communication of their progress.

Develop a clear strategy for learning, teaching and assessment to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy across the school.

The school has made good progress in this area for improvement. Senior leaders provide teachers with clear guidance and examples of good learning and teaching. This is raising teachers' expectations within their classes. Senior leaders introduced a clear assessment overview for literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. As a result, teachers identify accurately the needs of individual children and now plan timely and appropriate targeted support. Senior leaders have improved their approaches to tracking children's attainment in literacy and numeracy across the school. All staff speak with confidence of how useful this system is in helping them meet the learning needs of the children in their class. The majority of children are on track to achieve expected levels of attainment in all aspects of literacy and numeracy. While attainment is improving overall, there is still room to improve further, to ensure all children achieve their best.

The quality of teaching is improving across the school, due to teachers' higher expectations of learning and teaching. Children enjoy learning in a calm, purposeful environment. Behaviour across the school has improved. Children speak enthusiastically of the changes the acting headteacher, in particular, has made in the school. Teachers are at the very early stages of involving children in planning and leading their learning. The provision of the nurture rooms are helping children settle more quickly if they are upset or worried. We have asked senior leaders to clarify the benefits of the nurture rooms to ensure all parents appreciate why and how they are used.

Children who attend the additional support classes have access to a full curriculum, including a base class within their mainstream primary school. They now benefit from personalised targets to help with their learning. The use of resources to provide a life skills classroom is extending children's learning opportunities and making a real difference to how and why they learn. Children who attend additional support classes now have regular multi-agency reviews of their progress, which are meeting their needs in a more coordinated way. Staff should continue to develop their approaches to engaging children with autism in their learning.

Review and refresh the curriculum to ensure depth, challenge and application and improve children's skills and knowledge across all areas of the curriculum.

The staff team has worked well together to create progression pathways across literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and social studies. This is helping to improve how teachers deliver these areas of the curriculum in all classes. Children's use of technology is improving through using laptop computers and engaging in simple computer programming using robotics. This increased use of digital technologies in each class is effective in supporting or enhancing children's learning. There is an emphasis throughout the school in using the immediate environment outside. Children are responding well to learning out of doors. The school could extend children's outdoor experiences by developing further an outdoor learning programme, which is coherent and progressive for all children across the school. Senior leaders should keep under review the development of all curricular pathways to ensure maximum impact and consistency. This will ensure children experience depth, challenge and application in all aspects of their learning. There remains a need to consult with children and their families to develop a clear curriculum rationale. The school is beginning to increase opportunities for children who attend the additional support classes to have a voice in school

matters, including several leadership and enterprise opportunities. Children would benefit from increased opportunities to develop further their life skills in real contexts within the local community.

Further aspects of school improvement

Staff should continue to develop their approaches to engaging fully children with autism in their learning. The involvement of partner agencies who work with, and alongside, the school has increased significantly since the initial inspection. Partners comment that communication and partnership arrangements are working very well. They are welcomed into the school and changes are resulting in increased opportunities for children and their families. Children have achieved success in the sportscotland bronze and silver awards in a short space of time. This is helping children to build resilience, be part of a team, and they are now enjoying a strong sense of achievement.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Fife Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Elizabeth Paterson
HM Inspector