

Summarised inspection findings

Towie Primary School and Nursery Class

Aberdeenshire Council

23 April 2019

Key contextual information

Towie Primary School and Nursery is a small, rural school set in Upper Donside. The school is in the small village of Towie. The majority of children travel to school by bus from homes along the Don Valley and from the more remote glens of Glenbuchat and Glen Deskry. The school roll is 53 with 20 children attending the nursery in five morning sessions per week.

1.3 Leadership of change

weak

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher articulates well her vision for the school, which focusses on developing children's wellbeing within a strong sense of community. She works with parents and children to model her expectations of how members of Towie Primary School ensure everyone is included in the school community. She knows every child and their family and this helps establish the positive, supportive relationships parents have with staff in the school. The school has revisited and reviewed its vision, values and aims in consultation with children, parents and partners. The school needs to develop the school's vision, values and aims so that the vision statement describes better their ambitions for all children. The school's vision needs to be more aspirational and be clearer as to what the school wants children to achieve. This will support staff to raise their expectations of what children can do and how well they can achieve.
- Parents views are sought on a range of aspects of the school's work. They were involved in the review and creation of the school's values of wisdom, integrity, self-belief, empathy and respect. Teachers highlight these values in class lessons and assemblies. Children receive recognition for their efforts in embracing the school's values through praise and school awards. Children are aware of the school's values. Following a review the school has now adopted the wellbeing indicators as their overarching aims. Staff need now to highlight the school's values, linked to the wellbeing indicators, more fully throughout the school's work. They need to develop the language of the wellbeing indicators across all areas of the work of the school to support children to improve their understanding of the importance of wellbeing.
- Staff understand the context of the school and the challenges each child faces. This helps them to form positive relationships with each individual child. They take account of the rural setting of the school to plan for children to experience a breadth of cultural experiences beyond the local community. For example, the recent music week allowed children to experience a range of musical activities which were new to them. This has resulted in a few children choosing to learn to play a musical instrument. Every child took part in a concert during the week and using their new-found confidence most chose to perform in front of an audience at the end of year assembly.
- Staff engage in a range of professional learning opportunities. Staff work collectively together and undertake ongoing professional dialogue. They have a range of leadership roles including developing maths, information technology and sustainability. They reflect on, and contribute to,

the school's improvement priorities. Teachers professional learning and current leadership roles are not yet impacting sufficiently on improving outcomes for children and their families. The school's improvement priorities are manageable and linked to national and local priorities. Teachers are currently using How good is our school? (4th edition) more meaningfully to reflect on the school's strengths and areas for development. A whole school audit supports staff to reflect on current school practice against the quality indicators in How good is our school? (4th edition).

- The headteacher needs to develop further self-evaluation activities to support staff to identify accurately the school's strengths and areas for improvement. School improvement priorities need to be linked better to areas for development identified as a result of self-evaluation. Staff need to improve their analysis of data arising to support them to better identify improvement priorities appropriate to the school. Staff need to develop a culture of self-evaluation to support them to become more aware of what areas for improvement require greatest attention in the school. Leadership of change at all levels needs to be more closely aligned to the school improvement priorities. Staff should work towards gathering evidence of showing improvements in children's learning experiences across the school.
- The school's quality assurance calendar provides a structure for evaluation of improvement activities over the course of the school year. Evaluative activities include classroom observations which provide feedback to teachers on classroom practice. Feedback from classroom observations needs to support teachers better to improve their classroom practice so that children experience consistently high quality teaching. A quality improvement visit by representatives from Aberdeenshire Council, in May 2018, correctly identified a need for teachers to develop opportunities for them to systematically review and refresh their pedagogical practice. This should include opportunities for teachers to visit schools beyond the school cluster to observe best practice. The school now needs to act on this with greater pace of change. Quality assurance of forward planning of learning needs to provide teachers with greater clarity of the school's expectations in relation to planning of children's learning
- Children have opportunities to take part in school improvement groups which include global citizenship, digital technology, rights respecting school and eco schools. These help children to understand better the importance of these areas as part of their education. The school should continue with their plans to increase children's leadership roles within these groups. Children have a few opportunities to lead learning within the school, in particular through the school's Towie Connections topic. Teachers should now look to develop further their classroom practice so that children experience increased opportunities to lead their learning. Children on the pupil council regularly set the agenda and take the minutes of any meetings. The school should continue their plans to develop further the role of the pupil council to provide children greater opportunities to identify and support school improvement priorities.
- The school engages with parents who feel there is a sense of community in the school. This is evidenced in times of inclement weather, when parents will volunteer lifts to others so that children don't miss out on their education. In the event of a school closure, every child in the school has a place of safety to go to and parents support each other by making sure every child can get either home or to their place of safety. Teachers have led workshops to support parents to understand better the approaches the school uses to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. The Parent Council previously focussed on running fundraising activities for children to experience a wider range of experiences outwith the community. New membership on the Parent Council have recently recognised there is scope for them to be more fully involved in supporting the school to identify and take forward school improvement priorities.

- The school has used Pupil Equity Funding to purchase staff training and resources, new mathematics textbooks, a range of activities to develop children’s resilience and music skills and to purchase IT. The school needs to ensure that these initiatives are targeted appropriately and result in improved attainment for children most affected by deprivation.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- All children with whom HM Inspector's spoke said they enjoy being at school. There is a calm and relaxed atmosphere in classes and children are respectful to adults and each other. Staff are beginning to plan collaboratively to improve progression. The school is developing its approach to tracking and monitoring children's progress in literacy and numeracy within, and across, Curriculum for Excellence levels. Staff discuss children's progress with the headteacher on a planned regular basis across the school year. This should now lead to an analysis of individual and group data over time which informs effective planning. Currently the tracking system provides an outline of all the children and their needs. A more consistent approach should be developed by teachers to provide feedback to children so that they are clear about their next steps in learning. Children would benefit from setting their own personal learning targets and be clearer about success criteria required for them to complete tasks to a high standard. This will help them to understand their areas for strength and next steps in learning. Monitoring and tracking should be developed across all curricular areas to ensure progress in learning across the curriculum is of an appropriate pace and is suitably challenging for all learners.
- In most lessons children are too passive and are not sufficiently engaged or motivated by their learning experiences. Learning is overly teacher led and children would benefit from opportunities to be independent and to lead their learning. There is scope for children to have more choice and responsibility for their learning and for pace and challenge to be improved. There are opportunities to develop the classroom environments to reflect and support children's learning across all areas of the curriculum. Teachers should work together to set standards across the school and through their monitoring ensure approaches to learning, teaching and assessment are consistently applied. They need to have higher expectations of what children are able to do and how well they can work independently. Where children have opportunities to work individually, in pairs and in small groups they benefit from greater independence. Teachers need to differentiate lessons more effectively in order to better meet the needs of all learners. The school should continue with their plans to develop children's skills in digital literacy more fully.
- Assessment of children's progress in literacy and numeracy needs to be developed to provide more accurate information on children's progress. Assessment needs to be used more effectively to inform planned learning and teaching. Teachers are developing their confidence in using national benchmarks to support their assessment of achievement of a level. There is scope to develop teachers' understanding and confidence in the achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels to ensure that professional judgements are based on robust evidence. Children's progress within Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy is recorded at key points. Evidence of learning is used to judge children's progress. There is a need to develop a shared understanding of the standards expected across curricular areas. This includes scope for improving staff and children's engagement in

planning and evaluating learning. Teachers have been involved in moderation activities with other schools in the cluster including literacy and numeracy. The school should continue to develop a more consistent whole-school approach to assessment, linking assessment more effectively to planned learning and teaching. Holistic assessments should be a focus of further assessment developments and moderation activities to ensure breadth, challenge and application of learning. A robust programme of moderation activities across levels should be developed in order to make teacher judgement and assessment more valid and reliable.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Overall there is scope to improve the curriculum across the school. There is a need to work with all stakeholders to develop an improved curriculum rationale which better reflects the context of the school community and the school's vision, values and aims.
- Teachers use local authority progression pathways to plan learning experiences across all curricular areas. They are beginning to use the national benchmarks to assess children's progress. Staff need to use the progression pathways better to plan for increased pace and challenge through the levels. There is a need to review interdisciplinary learning to ensure effective pace and progression in learning.
- The school should develop a planned progressive pathway for digital skills. Children have access to interactive whiteboards laptops and tablets. They use these to word process, research and reinforce and consolidate literacy and numeracy skills. These activities need to be developed further as part of a planned progression of skills.
- Children in P1-5 enjoy learning French as part of the 1+2 approach to modern languages. Children in P6-7 are also enjoying learning Spanish.
- Developing skills for learning, life and work is currently at a very early stage of development. This should continue to be developed along with the development of science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) subjects.
- The school should continue with their plans to develop outdoor learning as a whole school approach.
- A well planned transition programme is in place to support children transferring to Alford Academy and for children transferring from the nursery to P1. Effective enhanced transition arrangements are in place for those children requiring additional support.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- See choice QI 2.5

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Developing children's wellbeing is an important focus of the headteacher's aspirations for the school. The wellbeing indicators have been adopted as the school's aims. Staff understand the importance of positive relationships to ensuring children's wellbeing. Relationships across the school are positive and children know they learn in a school where they are cared for. Restorative approaches are used to resolve any disputes between children and this supports children to appreciate how their behaviours can impact on others. As a result children are considerate of, and show empathy towards, each other. Children do not yet have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of the wellbeing indicators. Teachers need to develop their use of the language of the wellbeing indicators across the school. This should be more consistently, and regularly, linked to the school's vision, values and aims to develop further children's understanding of what the school's aspirations are for them. This development should be more explicitly linked to children's rights to support children to understand better their rights as described in the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child.
- Staff know each child and their families such that they are able to identify where children are experiencing difficulties. Staff intervene respectfully and sensitively, when required. Parents know they can approach staff with any concerns they may have and are confident that these will be dealt with effectively. The school takes action to ensure all families have access to school activities. The school ensure funds are used appropriately to ensure all children and their families enjoy equity of access. The school's work to develop children's understanding of resilience has been extended to parents and families.
- Children's additional support needs are reviewed termly by the headteacher, staff and additional support for learning teacher. This supports staff to maintain an overview of which children require support and what type of intervention is required. The termly reviews support staff to identify the effectiveness of any interventions and make changes as necessary. The school should consider how the termly reviews identify children requiring additional support so that teachers can maximise the effectiveness of interventions by support staff. Targets for a few children are captured in their individualised education programme (IEP). IEPs are reviewed at termly reviews and progress against identified targets is monitored and tracked. Parents are involved in the creation, and reviewing, of children's IEPs. The school maintains an individualised record of support for a few children. The school should consider how they could improve processes for identifying children requiring additional support. This should include how children's additional support needs are recorded. Children's targets, including those in IEPs could be more time specific. Interventions deployed could be reviewed more effectively, to better support teachers to monitor and track children's progress.
- The school is developing its use of outdoor spaces to develop children's learning outwith the classroom. The woodland school in the local community provides children with valuable opportunities to learn about nature and woodcraft skills. Teachers use this space to develop

children's understanding of assessing risk when making a camp fire. The school should develop further their use of the school's grounds and the surrounding community to develop further children's wellbeing.

- All children are members of school development groups and the pupil council. This is supporting them to develop their confidence when working with their peers to take forward the agenda relevant to each group. The school needs to now develop further children's roles within these groups. Children should take more ownership of the work of these pupil groups and be supported to identify better what impact their role on the groups is having on their wellbeing.
- The school is currently focussed on developing children's resilience. Staff have undertaken professional learning to support this work. The school has worked with partners to develop their approaches to supporting children's and adults mental health. This includes the development of children's emotional intelligence. The school plans more broadly for children's wellbeing from a local authority progression framework. The headteacher should support staff in developing a fuller progressive programme to develop children's skills in health and wellbeing. In doing this staff will be able to give a clearer picture of children's progress in this area. A few children say they would welcome increased opportunities to develop their wellbeing.
- Children have opportunities to discuss issues related to equality and diversity through planned learning in current affairs. Children are able to identify issues relating to religion, immigration and refugees. The school needs to build into their curriculum more meaningful opportunities for children to learn about issues relating to equality and diversity in a more planned and progressive way.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall children's attainment in English language and literacy and mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory. A majority of children across the school are making satisfactory progress from their prior levels of attainment. Children requiring additional support are making progress in line with their individual learning needs. Having observed children's learning in classes, spoken to focus groups of children, reviewed their work in jotters and workbooks and considered the school's attainment evidence HM Inspectors are not confident in the reliability and robustness of the school's attainment data.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, across the school, children's attainment in numeracy is satisfactory. The school has recently adopted an approach to develop children's mastery in numeracy and mathematics. This approach is currently too reliant on a single series of textbooks. Planning for numeracy needs to be developed to provide children with a much broader range of experiences for them to develop their numeracy and mathematics skills. This should include both discrete learning and opportunities to develop numeracy across other areas of the curriculum.
- Data provided by the school does not accurately reflect what children can do. From observations of children's learning, classwork and conversations with children it is evident most children could be making better progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are capable of making better progress. Teachers need to continue to develop their understanding of pedagogy and progression in numeracy and mathematics to support all children in making better progress.
- Across the school, at all stages children would benefit from more consistent and regular opportunities to develop their mental calculation skills.

Number, money, measure

- At the early level a majority of children are able to identify numbers to ten. By the first level most children can perform additions with a few able to add three digit numbers. A majority of children can count on in twos, fives and tens. Most children can perform simple subtractions and calculate the cost of items in pounds and pence using visual aids. A majority of children can tell the time from a clock face with a few accurately able to identify the difference between AM and PM in 12 hour time. A majority of children can find the next number in a number pattern including numbers with up to three digits.
- By the second level a majority of children can perform additions with numbers including up to two decimal places. A few can compare fractions and identify which is larger, with most able to identify equivalent fractions. Most children can find fractions of an amount and add or subtract simple fractions. A few children can multiply and divide fractions. A majority of children can use

the correct units to find the length or weight of a shape or object. They can compare the size of a shape or object and reflect on whether an answer is reasonable. The majority of children at the second level can calculate a simple percentage of an item and use this to find the value of a pay rise. The majority of children can identify the factors of a number.

Shape, position, movement, Information handling, Problem solving and probability

- Teachers develop children's numeracy and mathematics skills through the school's recently purchased mathematics and numeracy textbooks. This is limiting children's opportunities to develop their skills across a broad range of organisers. Children's learning, across the school, focusses heavily on number work. Children need to experience increased opportunities for them to develop their mathematics skills in shape, position and movement, information handling, problem solving and probability.

Attainment in Literacy

- Overall attainment in literacy is satisfactory. The majority of children are making satisfactory progress in English and literacy.

Listening and talking

- Overall attainment in listening and talking is good. Children across the school are articulate and confident in their interactions with adults. The majority of children listen respectfully to each another. They work well in pairs and groups. Children confidently express their views and opinions to which the majority listen well. At the early level, almost all children are able to take turns. At first and second level, most children listen carefully during learning. They develop listening and talking skills across the curriculum in a range of contexts. At first level, children listen and respond appropriately to others in a respectful way by answering and asking questions. At second level, children show respect for the views of others and offer their own viewpoint. They now need a range of opportunities to develop their skills in presenting to larger audiences.

Reading

- Overall attainment in reading is satisfactory. At the early level children are developing emergent literacy skills and can identify sounds to help them decode new words. They would benefit from more practice in reading aloud to improve fluency. At the first and second levels children enjoy reading and choose books from a graded reading scheme. At the first level children read with fluency and expression. They can offer their own ideas about characters and settings. At the second level children read with fluency and understanding. They can explain their preference for particular texts and authors in detail. Across the school further opportunities should be provided for children to interrogate texts and discuss a range of literary features.

Writing

- Overall, attainment in writing is satisfactory. Children across the school write for a range of purposes for example imaginative stories, reports, poems and instructions. At the early level children can make an attempt to use a capital letter and a full stop in at least one sentence. At the first level children can plan and organise ideas and information using appropriate formats for example report writing. At the second level children write for a range of purposes and audiences selecting appropriate genre and style. They use paragraphs to separate thoughts and ideas and are learning the appropriate use of speech marks. Overall staff should have higher expectations of what children can achieve in writing and encourage them to write more.

Attainment over time

- Over a few years, the headteacher and staff have used standardised assessments, school assessments and professional dialogue to track children's progress. Currently, there are opportunities for teachers to analyse this information with support from the headteacher. Staff should ensure data is analysed effectively to identify and track the impact of interventions to ensure the best outcomes for children. Better use of data will enable staff to provide more effective differentiation and to increase the pace and challenge of learning across the school. The information from the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) should continue to be incorporated into discussions on monitoring and tracking.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children's wider achievements are celebrated in school through assemblies, on the school blog and in the Good News Book. The school offers opportunities for children to achieve more widely in relation to the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Children benefit from participating in after-school activities and clubs such as football and science. Senior children take groups during the school day to offer sessions in basketball and rugby. Pupil leadership groups have been established linked to the four priorities of the school improvement plan to involve children in the school improvement process. Children's achievements in and out of school are recorded and celebrated through school awards and at assemblies.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff are aware of the socio-economic context of their community. Given the small numbers in the school, children's and families' needs are known on an individual basis. Pupil Equity Funding has been used to support identified gaps in numeracy, build resilience, develop music skills and to widen children's access to a range of experiences. Overall, there is a need to raise aspirations about what children can achieve and to increase the pace and challenge in lessons.

Choice of QI : 2.5 Family Learning

- Engaging families in learning
- Early intervention and prevention
- Quality of family learning programmes

- Staff have established positive working relationships with parents of children at the school. There is an open and honest culture of dialogue. This supports parents well to know any issues they raise with their child's teacher will be treated sensitively. Parents views fully inform any action taken. Parents who experience difficulties are treated fairly and with respect. The school ensures any financial challenges they may be experiencing do not stop them from attending school events. Parents evenings have been held to share the schools approaches to how children learn about literacy and numeracy. This included parents being encouraged to reflect on their language when discussing maths at home. They now speak more positively about maths and it is hoped this will impact on children's attitudes towards the subject. The school football club team is helping families to make connections. There is a culture of mutual support amongst parents. They ensure each other's children make it to, and get home from, school on days of poor weather. The school puts community spirit at the heart of its work. Parents say they very much feel part of a community. The school should continue to build on this strong sense of community. Teachers should continue with their plans to develop opportunities where children and their families can learn together.
- The small rural setting supports staff to know their children and families. Staff have an understanding of the local community and the factors which affect children's and families lives. They use this knowledge to support children when families are experiencing difficulties or through periods of change. Children know they are cared for in the school and that they can rely on the school to help them when needed. Teachers should now look to develop further their understanding of data about the local community. This will help them have an improved understanding of the impact of their interventions.
- The setting of the school means there are few opportunities for family learning programmes.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.