

18 June 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Sunnybank School and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeen City Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the acting headteachers and staff. We heard from the acting headteachers 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the acting headteachers. 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.

Improve children's progress and attainment across the curriculum in both the school and Early Learning and Childcare setting.

The acting headteachers have supported sound improvement in children's progress and attainment in both the school and ELC setting.

In 2023, data provided by the school shows overall improvement with a majority of children at P1, P4 and P7 attaining appropriate Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in reading and writing. Most children achieved expected CfE levels in listening and talking in 2023. Most children in P1 achieved expected CfE levels in numeracy and a majority of children in P4 achieved expected CfE levels in numeracy in 2023. A minority of children in P7 achieved expected CfE levels in numeracy in 2023. Staff predict a continued pattern of improvement across most areas in literacy and numeracy. The majority of children in the ELC are making expected progress during their time in the setting.

Senior leaders and staff have improved the approaches used to support children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. They use data successfully to track children's progress in writing and use this to inform their next steps in learning. Staff and children have worked together to develop reading for enjoyment across the school community. Children now talk positively about their reading and recognise aspects such as their vocabulary is improving as a result. As planned, staff should extend the role of parents in this work. They should evaluate fully the impact of improvements with parents to inform next steps.

Improve the consistency, quality and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the school and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting. This should include ensuring that all children build on their prior learning and experience learning which is at the right level of difficulty.

Staff have made effective progress in this area for improvement. Across the school and ELC staff and all children experience mutually respectful relationships in positive learning environments. As a result, they demonstrate increased engagement, enthusiasm and motivation in their learning. Staff ensure children consistently understand the purpose of their

learning and what successful learning looks like. This supports children to know where they are in their learning and provides increased challenge.

The acting headteachers have provided clear leadership and guidance to teachers and practitioners. This is helping them to provide high-quality learning, teaching and assessment more consistently. They have agreed a set of expectations for high-quality learning and teaching to be applied by teachers.

Staff across the early level are developing their approaches to play-based learning well. They are well placed to share practice across the ELC and P1. In addition, they should look outwards to other settings to observe and reflect on effective practice in the local education authority and beyond. Staff should continue to engage in professional learning to develop play-based learning further.

Teachers are increasingly providing learning activities to meet the needs of individual children better. A majority of staff use a range of questioning to check understanding and deepen thinking. As a result, most children are experiencing learning at the right level of difficulty. A minority of children continue to require greater pace and challenge within their learning and would benefit from teachers having higher expectations of them and their work.

In the ELC, practitioners have updated how they plan learning and monitor children's progress. This updated approach better reflects children's prior learning and links more consistently to CfE experiences and outcomes and developmental milestones. Practitioners in both rooms use floorbooks to record learning experiences and share learning with parents and carers. Practitioners should continue to develop their professional learning to ensure children make the best possible progress in their learning.

Children now spend more time on learning that supports independence, teamwork and links to real-life contexts. The majority of children engage well in lessons, listening to and following instructions given by teachers and support staff. A few children continue to require support to remain on task and engage in their individual learning. All children learn best when they use real-life contexts and experience stimulating approaches. Teachers should continue to develop their use of creative and relevant contexts for learning including the use of digital technology and outdoor learning.

The acting headteachers have worked with teachers to agree how they will assess children's progress in learning. They should continue this work to ensure they use a common approach across the school. They should also agree how they will use pupil profiles to support children to make the best progress in their learning over time.

Senior leaders have implemented a more robust approach to monitoring the quality of teachers' learning plans. Planning now consistently includes information on prior learning and children's involvement in their learning. Teachers should develop learning plans further to link with children's interests and the local community better.

Senior leaders and staff should develop further their use of data to inform effective planning, assessment and tracking of individual children's attainment over time. This should include a focus on children facing barriers to their learning.

Senior leaders and staff have made sound progress in their use of data to track children's attainment. Importantly, they can demonstrate the progress children in each class are making throughout the session. The improved tracking and monitoring system is helping teachers identify children who are not making expected progress in learning. As a result, teachers identify appropriate support to get children's learning back on track. Teachers now predict if a child will achieve success at the appropriate CfE milestones. Senior leaders recognise the need to continue to develop how they use data at a whole school level to inform planning for interventions and support for particular groups of children.

Across the school, teachers are more confident in gathering data about the impact of supports for children who require additional support with their learning. Staff have improved their use of information to review children's progress regularly and set specific and measurable targets for children. As a result, a few children benefit from shorter and more focused support before returning to learning in their class. Senior leaders should ensure the impact of interventions funded through Pupil Equity Funding is evaluated closely. They should ensure that it supports children impacted by poverty to make faster and better progress in their learning.

Children with additional support needs are well-supported in nurturing learning environments across the school. Staff in the language support provision know children very well and use this knowledge to plan appropriate and impactful learning opportunities. Children are building on their previous learning and applying their learning in different contexts successfully. A few targeted children are supported through the Hive. Staff in this provision work well to create an environment where children feel safe and able to learn through a play-based approach. Staff use individual records and wall displays well to demonstrate children's progress in learning, wellbeing and their achievements.

What happens next?

The school has made positive 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. Aberdeen City Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Louise Phillips
HM Inspector