

24 January 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

**Mortlach Primary School and Nursery Class
The Moray Council**

In February 2014, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Moray Council. We subsequently returned to look at how the school had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in February 2015 and then in April 2016. 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 that 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 as we carried out this further inspection. Their report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Across the school, there remains much scope to improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. In the nursery, staff have introduced some approaches to help develop children's skills in literacy and numeracy. For example, as children use play dough they are developing their understanding of length. In their play, children continue to talk well to each other and adults. They use a wide range of vocabulary. A few children show an interest in reading and will independently choose a book to share with an adult. Staff need to define how skills in literacy and numeracy are being developed so that children are making the best possible progress. At the primary stages, there are a few improvements in attainment. Most notable are the improvements in some aspects of numeracy at P3. Staff are now making better use of information from some assessments to target specific support. There are still children across stages for whom pace of progress could be much brisker. We have asked staff to use a much wider and more robust range of assessment approaches. These need to be connected to Curriculum for Excellence levels and include all areas of children's learning. Staff also need to have more effective discussions with children on their progress as learners. From this, it would be useful to set focused individual targets to help children achieve more highly.

Improve the quality of the curriculum ensuring a more consistent high-quality learning experience for children at all stages.

The headteacher and her staff have developed aims for the curriculum. These are starting to take account of the local features of the school and national guidance. In the nursery, staff are starting to use children's interests in how they plan learning. At the primary stages, staff are more confident in their use of resources to deliver numeracy and mathematics. However, there remains the need for clear and strategic leadership of the curriculum. The pace of improving the curriculum is still too slow, with the result that national expectations are not being met. Children are not receiving the entitlements that are part of Curriculum for Excellence. Strong and prompt action is required to show how children are developing their skills, knowledge and understanding across the curricular areas and projects. Staff need to be clear of what is expected of children at each level to enable them to make appropriate progress which builds on previous learning.

Across the school, children are keen to learn and enjoy good relationships with staff. In the nursery, there are now fewer adult-led activities. However, children are still not benefitting often enough from playing outdoors. At the primary stages, children show a high level of responsibility in pair and group activities. We saw those in P7, for example, making choices and decisions on how they will learn. At almost all stages, we have asked staff to ensure that there is consistency in the promotion of deeper, high-quality learning. For this, children would benefit from more challenging, open-ended activities which encourage them to be more investigative in their learning.

Improve leadership for self-evaluation and approaches to tracking children's progress.

Across the school, staff are supportive of each other and continue to demonstrate a willingness to improve the work of the school. They are positive about sharing practice. The Moray Council has been supporting the school with professional learning. They are now assisting by making available a more manageable whole-school approach to tracking and monitoring children's progress in literacy and numeracy. This, along with planning of learning, needs to be built into purposeful discussions on improving children's progress. While the school uses a few approaches for self-evaluation, these are not making enough difference to achieve continuous or sustained improvement. There remain significant weaknesses in the leadership of change and improvement within the school. Staff need guidance and direction to help them achieve more positive impact for their pupils. As a result of the lack of pace and urgency in addressing our points for action, we are still not confident of the school's capacity for improvement.

What happens next?

The school has made insufficient progress since the original inspection. Our Area Lead Officer will liaise with The Moray Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will carry out another inspection of the school during 2017/18. In the interim, we will engage in regular monitoring activities of the school. These will include reviewing termly reports on the school's progress with our points for

improvement. We will also visit the school to make an interim check on their progress and provide support to assist improvement. We will ask The Moray Council to keep you, as parents, informed of the progress that the school is making. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents to inform you of the progress that the school has made.

During this further inspection, we examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. We have asked The Moray Council to inform us when they have addressed some important areas for development.

Joan C. Esson
HM Inspector

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