

17 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Craigton Lodge Nursery School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement, which we agreed with the setting and Aberdeen City Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the setting again. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the manager and practitioners. We heard from the manager and other staff about the steps the setting 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 setting has made and how well this is supporting children's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Stronger leadership and direction is required in order to secure improvement. Systematic monitoring of practice is needed to ensure improved outcomes for children. In particular attention should be paid to ensuring policies are fully embedded in practice.

The manager has worked with practitioners and families to establish a vision and values to underpin the work of the setting. There is now a clear sense of direction for further improvement. Parents, children and the staff team have been involved in deciding the vision of 'learning and growing together' and values of 'kind, included, happy and active'. The vision and values are evident throughout the work of the nursery.

Working as a leadership team, the manager and senior practitioners have revised roles and responsibilities of individuals. This is empowering individuals to assume a leadership role within playrooms and across departments. Working in this way is having a positive impact, for example increasing professional confidence. All practitioners are assuming responsibility for improvement within their playrooms. Practitioners are becoming increasingly confident about their practice and demonstrate a sustained enthusiasm for ongoing improvement. As a result, they are identifying relevant areas for improvement and making necessary changes. Increasingly practitioners are developing the skills to evaluate the impact of what they have done.

Input from the Locality Lead Officer from Aberdeen City Council has complemented the refreshed and developed sense of direction. Practitioners respect and value this input. She has successfully modelled practice and provided professional learning for the team. This has supported practitioners to bridge gaps in knowledge and deepen their understanding of curriculum areas. Positive working relationships between the Locality Lead Officer, practitioners and management have led to positive changes and have built capacity for continued improvement.

The manager has introduced systematic monitoring for aspects of practice. This includes evaluation of nursery routines, audits of accident and medication forms and reviews now in place for personal and support plans. The manager should now extend this to include a focus on learning and teaching including the quality of learning folios.

The manager has embedded a range of policies in practice. This includes practitioners being confident about the necessary measures they would take to ensure the safety of children. Arrangements are in place to ensure that practitioners are knowledgeable about policies and their responsibilities in carrying them out.

Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the setting.

Positive, nurturing relationships continue to be a strong feature of practice throughout the setting. Practitioners are caring and responsive to children's care needs. They interact sensitively with children in their play to promote curiosity and confidence. Practitioners should develop consistent use of quality questioning across the team.

Practitioners have reviewed and developed the routines of the nursery day using national guidance. This is providing higher quality, extended and uninterrupted time for children to engage in free flow play. Practitioners have increased the range of real-life and natural everyday resources to support further children's engagement and motivation in their learning. Children are taking increasing responsibility for their environment. They are encouraged to return the resources they have been using to the place where they belong.

Practitioners have engaged in professional learning to improve the quality of observations of children as they play. As a result, observations now have a sharper focus on children's learning. Practitioners are at early stages of identifying clear next steps in children's learning. They are revisiting next steps more frequently and developing the content to make targets more specific and personalised. Practitioners should consider ways to help children be aware of their own next steps in learning. They need to increase the use of learning folios to provide a meaningful context to discuss learning with children and families. This would build on the positively received individual progress meetings with parents introduced since the initial inspection.

Practitioners have reviewed planning formats to enable them to plan more effectively for children's learning. They have implemented planning around the national wellbeing indicators across all rooms. Practitioners should review further the planning for children aged under three years to ensure it better reflects age and stage of development. In the sunflower room, the newly introduced responsive planning is beginning to support children to have a greater input into the planning process. This is developing further their ownership of learning. It would be beneficial for practitioners to assume responsibility for areas in the learning environment. This would support the delivery of the planned learning and contribute to the shared leadership.

Practitioners have introduced an 'achievement wall' to enable children to celebrate their success in learning using the national wellbeing indicators. This is supporting children to be aware of their achievements and recognise their capacity to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Management and practitioners should develop their understanding of early learning and childcare pedagogy. They should use this knowledge to develop a clear statement on their curriculum.

All practitioners have undertaken a range of professional learning to develop further their understanding of quality early learning. This includes in-house training led by the Locality Lead Officer, online training and professional reading. They have engaged in professional dialogue with colleagues to support them to relate new learning to their own practice. Practitioners should continue to deepen their understanding of the different ages and stages of child development.

Practitioners' enhanced understanding of early learning means they are now ready to develop a curriculum rationale that reflects the unique context of Craigton Lodge Nursery. They should pay close attention to the curriculum design principles to help them set higher aspirations and expectations for all children. Practitioners should focus on the depth, challenge and progression provided in learning. This will support children to make the progress that they are capable of, as a result of their nursery experiences.

Develop and implement an effective system for self-evaluation to identify what is working well and what needs to improve.

Practitioners are significantly more reflective in their practice. The manager has designed and led the implementation of a structured programme of meetings involving herself, senior practitioners and practitioners. These meetings are reflective and have a clear focus on the development of quality practice through increasing professional knowledge and confidence.

Practitioners in each playroom contribute to self-evaluation linked to developing the quality of the learning environments. They document this in 'evaluation of change' folders. Recently, identified practitioners from each playroom undertook a detailed audit of literacy and numeracy provision. As a result, practitioners have developed action plans to bring about improvements. They welcome this new way of working and are proud of their achievements.

As individuals, practitioners maintain a professional reflective journal. This process is beginning to support practitioners to reflect on their practice and improvements they have made. Increasingly, this is helping practitioners to identify and reflect on the impact changes are making to outcomes for children. Working with the Locality Lead Officer, the manager has correctly identified the need for practitioners and herself to be outward looking. They should continue to increase awareness of good practice and current thinking in early learning and childcare beyond the setting.

The manager has developed appropriate plans to deliver improvements linked to the initial inspection. Greater use now needs to be made of the national framework, 'How good is our learning and childcare?'. This will provide opportunities to accurately benchmark what is working well and what still needs to improve. Practitioners are at the very early stages of making use of this framework. The manager is keen to make full use of the framework to support ongoing development and improvement.

What happens next?

The setting has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the setting 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 setting's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its settings.

Barbara Daly
HM Inspector