

27 June 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Sandwick Junior High School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Shetland Islands Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in September 2022. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children/young people and worked closely with the acting headteacher and staff. We heard from the acting 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the acting headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting children's and young people's learning and achievements.

This letter sets out what we found.

Clear, focused leadership needs to be provided to support continuous improvement in the school and early learning centre. Senior leaders, middle leaders and staff need to develop a shared understanding about key improvement priorities and work together to ensure these are taken forward in a timely manner.

Senior leaders have developed clear key improvement priorities that set out a strong direction across the school and the early learning and childcare setting. The priorities are reflected well and comprehensively in a school improvement plan. Staff have undertaken targeted professional learning linked to the priorities. This has helped them both to develop a shared understanding of the priorities and to work together more effectively to take them forward.

Senior leaders and staff are more involved now in monitoring the quality of the school's work. They have made effective progress in improving communication across the school and strengthening engagement with parents. Staff have also made improvements in relation to how the vision and values and aims are informing the school's work.

As a matter of priority, the school needs to improve the structure of the curriculum in the broad general education. Particular emphasis should be placed on developing a broad and progressive curriculum at the primary stage

Staff continue to improve the structure of the curriculum in the broad general education. Frameworks have been introduced for literacy and numeracy at the primary stages that help children build on prior learning. All teachers at these stages are using the frameworks consistently to help them determine children's attainment and progress. A next step for teachers will be to implement a recently developed framework for health and wellbeing. Teachers at the primary stages also use a variety of frameworks for information and communications technology, religious and moral education, and modern languages.

Teachers at the secondary stages have introduced frameworks for all curriculum areas at S1. These have the potential to support teachers' planning, building on children's prior learning and improving children's transition from the primary to the secondary stages.

Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment need to be improved across the school. This should enable all children and young people to experience and benefit from learning, teaching and assessment which is of a higher quality.

Most teachers are now using a wider range of approaches to improve learning and teaching. This includes providing more tailored work to meet the needs of individual children and young people. They are also using more consistent routines at the beginning of lessons and providing children and young people with clear explanations to support their learning. Teachers are sharing increasingly with children and young people how they can be successful.

Across the school, teachers are using a broader range of assessment strategies. Daily, most teachers give learners appropriate feedback to help them understand more effectively their next steps in learning. While much of this feedback is given verbally, written feedback is also used well at times to support children and young people effectively.

The school needs to improve its approaches for checking the progress of children across the school. This will help teachers to build on children and young people's prior learning more effectively, and raise attainment. It will also help children and young people to understand their learning more effectively.

The school has improved its approaches to checking the progress of children across the school. Senior leaders have developed helpful approaches to assessment and recording that are becoming increasingly robust and reliable. These include regular meetings between senior leaders and staff to discuss children and young people's progress, attainment and wellbeing. Teachers use evidence from these meetings to plan individual children and young people's next steps.

Across the school, senior leaders and teachers are also using more structured tracking and monitoring processes to monitor the progress and attainment of children and young people more consistently.

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. Shetland Islands Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Celia McArthur
HM Inspector