

25 February 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In December 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Kittybrewster School and Nursery Class. 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 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the 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 learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Senior leaders should provide clear, strategic leadership and direction to staff to guide improvements across the school and nursery.

Following the appointment of the new acting headteacher and acting senior staff leadership team (SLT) the school and nursery class improvements are showing significant progress. They correctly prioritised areas quickly to support improvements as identified in the previous inspection. There is now in place a clear direction and plan for school improvement. This helps the SLT and staff check how well the school is doing, which in turn gives more confidence to parents. There are clearer ways to monitor children's progress in learning. Staff are working well together and feel better supported by the SLT to make changes to the teaching and learning in their classes.

Practitioners in the nursery class now feel included, valued and involved in the wider work of the school. More focused, regular team meetings are helping practitioners contribute their ideas and skills to planned improvements. Individual discussions between key workers and members of the SLT about the progress of children in their group is challenging practitioners to adapt learning and teaching to better meet children's needs.

Senior leaders should organise for staff to work with staff in other schools to ensure they understand national standards of attainment, and to develop consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across all stages.

The SLT have developed clear guidance for all staff. This enables teachers to have a consistent approach to planning for learning to meet national expectations. They are now planning, assessing and checking Curriculum for Excellence levels with their colleagues. They are becoming more accurate when making professional judgements of achievement of a level. Across other schools in the local schools group, teachers are now able to discuss with other colleagues what progress for pupils means at different levels of attainment. Most pupils are now experiencing learning opportunities that are more interesting and set at the right level of difficulty. Promoting learning through play between the nursery class and across the early level of primary stages is necessary.

In the nursery class, warm, nurturing relationships between practitioners, children and parents continue to be evident in all aspects of the work of the team. Visits to and from other settings and support from the local authority has informed important improvements to the layout, resources and accessibility of the learning environment. As a result, most children are independent, make important choices about their play and frequently self-select and use resources to develop their ideas.

Continue to develop approaches to tracking and monitoring the work of the school and children's progress in learning, in order to raise children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.

The school has made good progress in this area for improvement. Teachers are now planning appropriate and regular assessment opportunities to track children's progress. The SLT have introduced improvements to how they track children's attainment in literacy and numeracy across the school. All staff speak with confidence of how useful this system is helping them meet the learning needs of the children in their class.

Children we spoke with told us of the new resources that they now use to support their reading and writing. In particular, the establishment of a new school library is having a positive effect on children's willingness to read. This is having a positive impact on the pace of children's progress in reading. Across the school, children are making satisfactory progress. The majority of children are on track to achieve expected levels of attainment in all aspects of literacy and numeracy. While attainment is improving overall, there is still room to improve further to ensure all children achieve their best.

In the nursery, the SLT have also introduced important changes to begin to improve the cycle of planning, observation, assessment, tracking and monitoring of learning. The whole school tracking document now includes the progress of children in the nursery suitable to their stage of development. As a result, children are making better progress in literacy and numeracy.

Across all stages, staff need to develop consistent approaches to assessment to inform children's next steps in learning. This will support children to know what they need to do to improve further.

The quality of teaching is improving across the school due to higher expectations of learning and teaching. Children, enjoy learning in a calm purposeful environment. Behaviour across the school has improved and children speak enthusiastically of the changes the acting headteacher in particular, has made in the school. Teachers in most classes give clear explanations of what they want children to learn, what success looks like and the next step in learning.

An annual assessment calendar is now in place. This is helping to provide reliable evidence of how children are progressing at key points in each school year.

Senior leaders regularly visit classes to build a picture of children's experiences and progress, which supports professional dialogue with teachers. The increased use of digital technologies in each class is effective in supporting or enhancing children's learning.

Involve all children in planning and leading their learning, and in decision-making about aspects of school life that affect them. Provide more regular opportunities to give children choice and responsibility to develop greater independence in their learning.

Children and staff together created the 'Language of Learning' prompts visible in the school and in each class. These are helping children evaluate their own learning in a meaningful way. When asked, children are able to say how well they are doing but also what they need to improve further. Children are better engaged in their learning through the emphasis on outdoor learning and a greater choice of lunchtime and after school clubs. A pupil council is now in place and gathers children's views on school matters. Practical ideas such as 'the handrail safety rules', when using the stairwell are now in place. We have suggested that children could lead further developments across the school and take responsibility for aspects of their learning, successes and achievements.

Further aspects of school improvement

The acting headteacher and senior team appointed in May 2019 quickly made improvements to the fabric of the building and removed out of date resources. They effectively used funds from the Pupil Equity Fund as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to enhance children's learning experiences and improve a wider range of resources to help children particularly in literacy and numeracy. These interventions have all helped improve the environment for teaching and learning. In addition, parental support and parent involvement in the life and work of the school has increased.

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

Elizabeth Paterson
HM Inspector