

5 March 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Dunnottar School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire 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. 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.

Continue to work as a team to ensure that all children experience high quality-learning and teaching across the school and nursery class. In doing so staff should improve the planning of learning, teaching and assessment.

Overall, there has been positive progress made in addressing this area for improvement. As planned, staff should continue to develop their approaches to learning and teaching to build on this positive start.

The headteacher and representatives from Aberdeenshire Council have supported staff well to improve the quality of learning and teaching across the school and nursery. Staff have engaged in a programme of relevant professional learning. Staff's application of this professional learning is having a significant impact on improving children's learning experiences. It will be important for the local authority to maintain close links with the school to support staff as they continue to improve approaches to learning and teaching across the school.

Children learn in a calm, welcoming environment. The school values are now evident in the nurturing and respectful relationships and in interactions across the school. In most classes and in the nursery almost all children are engaged and motivated in their learning. Across the school, almost all teachers share the purpose of learning, and most teachers help children to understand how to be successful in their learning. Children are increasingly able to talk confidently about their learning. Most children in the middle and upper primary are beginning to understand their own targets and next steps in learning, particularly in writing and numeracy. In most lessons, children have a more active role in their learning. There are a few children who would benefit from further opportunities to lead their learning. The headteacher should continue to support all staff to share ideas and effective approaches to improve further the consistency of learning experiences across the school.

Children's use of digital technology across the curriculum has greatly improved. Children now use technology more regularly to support their learning. Teachers make effective use of technology to support children who require additional support with their learning. As planned, teachers should build on the progress made and continue to develop the effective use of digital technology across the school and nursery.

Staff have improved their planning of learning across the school and nursery. This is helping teachers to plan learning at the right level of difficulty for children in their class and is beginning to support increased pace and challenge for most children across the school. Teachers make good use of their local environment, particularly in learning which uses links across different subjects and outdoor learning in P1 and P2. Practitioners in the nursery have developed further their child-led planning and children's learning journeys. The headteacher should now support practitioners and teachers to work more closely across early level to develop further the approaches to play based learning.

Establish a clear strategy to raise attainment and achievement for all children across the school.

Overall, there has been positive progress made towards addressing this area for improvement. The headteacher should continue to work with staff to ensure all children make the best possible progress in their learning, particularly those children who require greater challenge in their learning.

The headteacher has developed a clear strategy to raise attainment and achievement. She is at the early stages of implementing this strategy. The headteacher now meets regularly with teachers to talk about what children are doing well and what they need to do to improve. There is a stronger focus on helping children who require support with their learning and those who would benefit from greater challenge. While it is too early to see the impact of this on raising attainment across the school, there are positive signs of this improving outcomes for children. The headteacher should continue to work with staff to ensure all children make the best possible progress in their learning.

The additional support for learning teacher and PSAs are deployed more effectively. Their time is now used effectively to support children within their class. This ensures children with the greatest need receive the most support. The headteacher should continue to support all staff to develop further approaches to universal and targeted support.

Teachers should continue to work together to develop further a shared understanding of national expectations and standards about what children can achieve, across all areas of the curriculum.

Overall, there has been positive progress made towards addressing this area for improvement. Teachers should continue to work together to develop further their understanding of national standards and expectations. They are keen to look outwards to learn from practice beyond their school and cluster.

Teachers have developed a stronger understanding of national expectations and standards. They have higher expectations of what children can achieve. Children's written work in jotters is now of a higher standard and better reflects national expectations, particularly in writing.

Teachers have responded positively to increased opportunities to work together as a team and with staff from other schools. Approaches to planning learning and checking children are making progress have improved. Teachers in the upper school have strengthened partnership working with staff from the high school. This is improving transition for children moving on to high school.

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

Marion Carlton
HM Inspector