Summarised inspection findings

Dunnottar School

Aberdeenshire Council

7 February 2023

Key contextual information

Dunnottar School serves the children from the old part of Stonehaven and the rural areas around Stonehaven. There are 165 on the roll arranged across eight classes. The nursery class is located on the Carronhill Campus, a 15-minute walk from the school. Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estates Team is developing plans to build a new school with a provisional completion date of 2025.

The headteacher has been in post since August 2021. Due to a reduction in the school roll, Aberdeenshire Council removed the post of depute headteacher from the school at the same time. Most children live within Social Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles seven to ten.

The school experienced significant staff absence last session due to the pandemic. This resulted in class closures, in addition to national periods of remote learning.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- There are important weaknesses within this aspect of the school's work. The headteacher has identified rightly the need to support the development of high-quality learning and teaching. Staff have worked collegiately to develop a shared understanding of what makes a good lesson. They should now work along with the headteacher to take forward their plans to improve the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

- Together, the school community has refreshed the school's vision, values, and aims. The school's motto, 'We Shine', and the school values (we are welcoming, we are determined, we respect, and we explore) are a prominent feature throughout the school. These are underpinned by an appropriate understanding of children's rights. The whole staff team support the pastoral care of children well. Positive relationships between staff and children are evident throughout the school. However, this values-based approach is not yet impacting sufficiently on the creation of a calm purposeful environment for learning in all classes.

- The majority of children engage well in the learning experiences provided. In most classes, a significant minority of children are not as engaged or as involved in their learning as they could be. For the majority of children, learning is not sufficiently challenging. Staff should raise their expectations of what children can achieve. They should ensure their expectations around the quality of work in jotters is appropriate at each stage. Children are encouraged to be 'brave' 'daring', 'heroic' or 'fearless' in their learning. Staff should develop further a shared understanding of what these terms mean, as there is not always a clear progression or increased level of challenge evident in assigned learning tasks.

- Across most stages, the majority of lessons are overly teacher led and aimed at the whole class. There is currently an over-reliance on worksheets. This leads to a majority of children

becoming disengaged and losing interest. Staff should review transitions between learning activities to ensure that time is used more effectively. Children need support to become more eager and active participants in their learning. They would benefit from increased opportunities to take responsibility for leading aspects of their own learning.

- In a few lessons, teachers engage children in creative, meaningful, and exciting learning experiences which build well on prior learning. In these lessons, children work co-operatively on a range of learning tasks and can talk confidently about their learning. Teachers should build on this positive practice and work together to ensure learning experiences are of a consistently high quality across the school.

- In a minority of classes, questioning is used well to deepen understanding and explore children's thinking. A few children spoke confidently about how 'Olly's family' characters helped them to reflect on different learning characteristics. Children would benefit from more regular opportunities to share their thinking and talk about learning strategies. This will support them to develop further their understanding of themselves as a learner and identify what they need to do to improve.

- A few children with additional support needs make use of digital technology effectively to support their learning. Staff should now consider how all children can further develop their digital literacy skills in a planned and progressive way across the curriculum.

- The school benefits from its proximity to a diverse range of outdoor learning environments including woodland and the harbour. There is significant potential to make greater use of the local environment to support planned, progressive outdoor learning experiences.

- Staff are at the very early stages of developing play-based learning in the younger classes of the school. There are early indications that this is beginning to provide meaningful learning experiences for children. Staff would benefit from engaging further with national practice guidance and appropriate professional learning. This should support them to increase their skills and knowledge when planning and providing rich learning experiences through play.

- Teachers in most classes share the purpose of learning at the start of the lesson. They could use these more effectively to shape learning conversations to help children gain a better understanding of their achievements and their learning journey. Children should be more involved in identifying how they will know that they have been successful. This will help them to become more confident in self and peer assessing pieces of work. Children in P7 are piloting the use of learning ladders to help them set clear, achievable targets in numeracy. To maximise their effectiveness, the headteacher should provide staff and children with further guidance on their use.

- Staff use a variety of formative and summative assessment approaches in different contexts across the curriculum. They undertake a range of baseline assessments at key points throughout the school year to inform planning and report on children's progress. Staff should develop further their knowledge and skills in interpreting assessment data to ensure it informs accurately planned learning and teaching. By so doing, they will be more able to set an appropriate pace of learning for all children. There is potential to streamline the school's overall approach to assessment. The headteacher should support staff to review the extensive range of assessments undertaken. This should help ensure assessment provides valid and reliable information about children's progress through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.

- The positive impact of teachers' engagement in moderation activities to support the current development of writing is evident in children's work. Teachers are strengthening their shared understanding of expected standards in writing as a result. Building on this positive start, they

should extend their involvement in moderation activities to support other areas of the curriculum, both internally and with other schools. This, and continued engagement with National Benchmarks, will support them to develop further a shared understanding of national standards. This should support teachers to increase their expectations of what children can achieve and be clear what children are learning in the experiences they undertake.

■ Teachers have opportunities to work together to plan and evaluate their practice, in addition to termly pastoral and attainment meetings with the headteacher. They should use these professional discussions as a platform to increase the pace and challenge of planned learning and teaching. Staff should ensure assessment approaches are integral to planning and are a useful support in planning next steps. This should support them to ensure all children are making appropriate progress. Staff should further review tracking systems to ensure they capture meaningful summative and formative assessment information in order to map each child's learning journey over time.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

■ The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. The majority of children are making satisfactory progress from prior levels of attainment. The majority of children are not sufficiently challenged in their learning and demonstrate that they have the potential to make better progress.

- Teacher's' professional judgement in relation to CfE levels is not yet sufficiently robust. There is discrepancy between teachers' professional judgement and information gained through standardised assessments. This indicates that children have the capacity to achieve more.

- Staff track the progress of children with additional support needs carefully. Children with identified needs are making good progress in relation to their individual learning targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- At early level, the majority of children can make simple predictions about texts. They can hear and say the different sounds made by letters. Children will benefit from increased opportunities to communicate and share stories in different contexts, for example in imaginative play. At first level, the majority of children can take turns and contribute in an appropriate way when engaging with others in a variety of contexts. They should continue to develop their ability to ask and respond to different types of questions. At second level, the majority of children enjoy engaging in discussions prompted by current affairs. They show respect for the views of others and can offer their own viewpoint. Staff should continue to provide opportunities for children to extend their listening and talking skills, such as through participation in debates. Children should develop further their ability to take notes using their own words and use these to create new texts for a range of purposes.

Reading

- The majority of children at early level can explore sounds, letters and words, discovering how they work together. They can hear and say the different single sounds made by letters. They should continue to develop their fluency, understanding and expression using appropriate pace and tone. At first level, the majority of children select different types of text for enjoyment and can explain their preference for particular texts and authors. They can share their thoughts about characters and settings. At second level, the majority of children can critically compare text and a film based on that text and justify their preference. A minority of children across first and second level express a desire for more challenging reading texts. Staff have rightly identified the need to upgrade the school library by improving the quality of

non-fiction books. As planned, the views of children should inform this refresh of reading materials.

Writing
- At early level, the majority of children are learning to form letters correctly. Staff should provide children with more opportunities to explore patterns and sounds through a range of play, imaginative and real-life contexts. This will support children to apply their writing skills in different contexts. Staff have identified that the pandemic has impacted the development of children's vocabulary and are taking appropriate steps to address this. At first level, the majority of children can write independently, punctuating most sentences accurately. They can create a variety of texts for different purposes, such as instructions, letters, and detailed descriptions. They should strengthen further their knowledge and application of spelling patterns, rules, and strategies. At second level, most children use a range of punctuation and write in a fluent and legible way. They make appropriate choices about layout and presentation. Across the school, children would benefit from developing further their ability to create digital texts.

Numeracy and mathematics
- Attainment in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory.

Number, money and measure
- Children across the school are developing a range of strategies to undertake number calculations. At early level, the majority of children can add confidently within ten, with some able to add within 20. At first and second levels, children have a good understanding of place value, decimals and can add, subtract, multiply and divide confidently. The majority of children at first level are able to find halves or quarters and are confident in rounding to nearest 10 or 100. Their ability to makes accurate use of instruments to measure should be developed further. At second level, children are beginning to develop their understanding of algebra. They can undertake calculations confidently around fractions and percentages. Children at all levels should be given opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in real life contexts.

Shape, position and movement
- At early level, children can recognise common two-dimensional shapes. At first level, they can describe the properties of common two-dimensional shapes and identify lines of symmetry. They can name common three-dimensional objects. At second level, children can describe angles and identify compass points with accuracy. The majority of children use appropriate mathematical language to calculate perimeter and area of shapes. Across all stages, children should develop further their ability to follow and record directions, including through the use of technology.

Information handling
- At early level, children can gather information and organise and display their findings in different ways. At first level, children can gather information and display this as a bar graph. At second level, the majority of children have a knowledge of a range of graphs and charts and their uses and can extract relevant information from them. Children should be given opportunities to develop their technology skills and knowledge to organise information in a database.

Attainment over time
- The headteacher tracks children's progress and attainment of CfE levels over time. Staff have identified specific gaps in learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are taking steps to address these through intensified support. Predicted levels of attainment indicate that

children across most stages will require sustained support to ensure a return to pre-pandemic levels of attainment.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Staff use a 'We Shine' achievement tracker to identify children who demonstrate the school values through class work and leadership roles. They monitor children's engagement in clubs and activities in school and beyond and use this to identify those at risk of missing out. This supports staff to take steps to ensure all children have the same opportunities to succeed. Children participate in challenges linked to the 'house system'. This reinforces their understanding of the school's values and the UNICEF goals. Children's wider achievements are recognised and celebrated through class recognition boards and star writer's awards. Pupil leadership groups are being re-established as part of the school's improvement agenda this session. Children who play instruments are provided with an opportunity to perform to an audience. Children share their achievements with their parents using a digital application. Staff should build on this positive start by identifying and tracking the skills children develop through their participation in these activities.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a good understanding of the social, economic and cultural background of children. They are developing partnerships with community organisations, such as the Community Larder, to support children and families. Staff understand the impact of the pandemic and the rising cost of living on families. They take a sensitive approach, enabling potential barriers to learning to be addressed. Approaches used to track and monitor children's progress should capture more clearly those who are disadvantaged by poverty.

- Children benefit from the support provided by enhanced staffing funded by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). This provides targeted support for children to close gaps identified in baseline assessments. Staff should review the effectiveness of PEF funded developments, such as mindfulness, on raising attainment and closing identified gap. This will support staff to understand and accelerate progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.