

25 June 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In June 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Lochmaben Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Dumfries and Galloway 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](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

**The local authority and senior leaders should support further the leadership in the nursery. This should include reviewing staffing and nursery routines to meet better children's wellbeing needs.**

The leadership of the nursery has improved significantly since the original inspection. The headteacher provides a greater level of support and direction to both the nursery manager and staff team. Together, they work very effectively to make necessary improvements to the playroom, outdoor space and children's experiences. Parents hold senior leaders in high regard and see the positive impact their leadership and vision have had.

The headteacher and nursery manager provide appropriate support and challenge to staff and have managed changes very well. Staff have benefited from support provided by the local authority's principal teacher for early learning and childcare. Staff now have leadership roles such as improving and updating areas within the playroom. They ask children for their views to make sure the spaces and experiences provide the right support and challenge for children. Staff work effectively as a team and take greater responsibility for improving their practice.

Staff have revised nursery routines in consultation with parents. For example, practitioners meet children at the nursery gate which helps children to settle in their play more quickly. Children enjoy daily together times which has strengthened their relationships with their keyworker. Staff have improved children's lunchtime experience which is a calm and sociable time. Children have time to engage in conversations and learn about healthy foods. They thrive when given responsibilities such as snack and lunch helpers.

Overall, senior leaders and practitioners have made very strong progress in this area for improvement.

**In the nursery, staff should apply professional learning to improve their daily practice. They should improve the quality of the experiences on offer to help children to be more interested in their play and learning.**

Senior leaders plan very well professional learning that helps staff improve their practice and plan higher-quality experiences for children. Staff are becoming more reflective and suggest how their learning can be used to improve the nursery. This team approach has improved notably the quality of children's experiences.

As a team, staff have improved the playroom significantly. Supported by senior leaders, they have replaced flooring and furniture and thought carefully about the layout of areas and resources. The playroom is a calm and spacious learning environment. In addition, staff plan more effectively experiences with an improved focus on literacy and numeracy. Children benefit from these changes. Almost all children have time and space to make choices and decisions in their play. The majority of children sustain their interest in activities for longer periods of time. This supports well their progress and achievement.

Staff have made positive progress in this area for improvement. Senior leaders should continue to encourage staff to share their professional learning with others. This should support the team to develop further a shared understanding of effective practice and evaluate clearly the impact it is having on outcomes for children.

**In the nursery, senior leaders should support practitioners to use observation and assessment evidence well to plan effectively for children's progress. This will help staff build on what children already know and provide learning at the right level of difficulty for all children.**

Staff have used professional learning well to develop their skills in observing, identifying and recording significant evidence of children's learning. Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of this information within children's journals to provide helpful feedback. This is resulting in a greater consistency and improved quality of children's journals across the team.

The nursery manager leads termly meetings with practitioners to discuss the progress children are making. Staff engage well with local authority guidance in this area which is supporting improved professional judgements. They use this guidance to plan next steps in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for children. Staff are becoming more confident when planning experiences that meet children's needs with most staff using this information well to plan. This approach is helping to ensure children are more appropriately challenged in their learning.

Overall, practitioners have made a positive start to using observations to plan effectively for children's progress. They recognise that they need to continue to build on this initial progress and deepen further their understanding of learning and progression.

**In the nursery, staff should build on recently introduced approaches to planning to ensure a better balance of responsive and intentional planning.**

Senior leaders have worked with staff to develop a clear curriculum and planning policy. Staff have engaged positively in professional learning on responsive and intentional planning. Staff

have used this learning effectively to provide a better balance of learning experiences for children. Children benefit from the mix of responsive and planned experiences to increase their learning across the curriculum.

Staff use daily reflection times well to share information about children's learning as a team. They each take responsibility for setting up areas of the playroom using their planning and this regular feedback. Staff take greater account of children's interests when planning and use information about children's progress well to improve experiences and resources.

Staff evidence children's progress in learning through big books. They capture children's experiences and leadership opportunities, linking this with planned learning. Children enjoy looking at the big book and talking about learning activities that they have been involved in.

Overall, practitioners have continued to strengthen approaches to planning. Increasingly, they are making stronger connections between children's interests and needs and planned learning to meet the needs of all children.

**In the school, senior leaders should now review all curriculum and planning guidance. They need to ensure children develop skills progressively and revisit previously learned skills regularly.**

Senior leaders have supported teachers very well to review and improve how they plan. Working very effectively as a team, teachers used evidence from the previous inspection to reflect honestly on children's learning experiences across the curriculum. They used staff development time, best practice visits and professional learning very well to improve their practice. Furthermore, senior leaders and teachers reviewed timetables to ensure an appropriate balance of curricular areas. Senior leaders monitor planning and timetabling more rigorously and provide feedback. They provide welcomed challenge to help teachers improve their practice. Teachers and parents talk very positively about the changes to learning and teaching as a result of improved planning. It will be important for senior leaders to continue this highly-effective approach.

Staff have improved learning environments to support children's readiness to learn. This whole school focus helps children settle and engage more effectively in learning. Teachers think carefully about the contexts for learning, ensuring they meet the needs of their class. They plan relevant and valuable links to literacy and numeracy to support children to use their learning in different curricular areas. Teachers use children's suggestions and interests to develop their plans. They record where learning builds upon children's previous experiences and plan clearly how children who require support will have their needs met. In addition, teachers plan high-quality assessments which provide valuable information about the progress children are making. They use this information very well to plan future learning that provides the right level of support and challenge for children. This newly-developed approach to planning has had a very positive impact on the quality of learning and teaching across the school. Teachers use very effectively their knowledge of children's abilities in literacy and numeracy to provide learning at the right level of difficulty. This supports all children to engage well in learning and experience success.

Overall, very strong progress has been made towards addressing this area for improvement.

### **In the school, continue to improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.**

Led ably by senior leaders, teachers have improved the quality of evidence they gather to understand the progress children make. They use professional learning in numeracy and writing well to ensure all children experience high-quality learning in these areas daily. Teachers manage their time very effectively to provide direct teaching to individuals and groups. This supports teachers to provide helpful, in the moment, verbal feedback to children. Teachers use this information very well to adjust their teaching which has improved significantly the pace of learning for children. Teachers plan regular opportunities for children to revise concepts and revisit learning. Children take responsibility to review and check mistakes which improves their understanding. As a result, children's work in jotters is of a much higher standard and now reflects national expectations.

Senior leaders provide well-received support and challenge to teachers during termly attainment meetings. This helps teachers to plan learning that is progressive and suitably challenging for the most able learners. This support from senior leaders also helps teachers develop a shared understanding of progress from early level through to second level. As a result, teachers use effectively their knowledge of what children can do in literacy and numeracy to plan learning across the curriculum. Children now spend more time on purposeful learning which is helping them to engage very well and also explain their thinking and learning. As a result, children experience learning at the right level of difficulty and make good progress. Furthermore, children's mental agility has improved significantly. They explain confidently the strategies they use to arrive at an answer. Senior leaders continue to plan effectively support for children who require it. This helps all children close gaps in learning and increase their progress. At all stages, and across all organisers in literacy and numeracy, attainment has improved.

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.

### **In the learning centre, staff should find ways to record and check children's development of skills and achievements across the curriculum. This will allow staff to plan children's next steps and build on their learning.**

Led effectively by the headteacher, staff in the learning centre engaged in professional learning about children's progress and skills development. They used this training very well to agree approaches to celebrate and evidence children's successes and the progress they make as a result of learning. Together they developed an effective tracking tool to gather and evidence children's progress across all curricular areas. This approach provides an accessible and clear overview of the incremental progress children make.

Staff audited learning environments and adapted rooms very well to reflect the needs of children accessing the learning centre. Using feedback from the initial inspection, they redesigned and repurposed the two classrooms to create a play space and focused learning space. Children have responded very well to these changes, engaging positively in their play and learning. Children sustain their engagement in activities for longer periods of time.

Staff provide a better balance of play and teaching experiences for children. This supports them to capture the wide range of skills children develop as a result of their play and learning. Staff skilfully record children's learning and progress on displays and in journals, linking these to children's individual targets. These journals provide valuable information for parents about the progress each child makes. Children are excited and enthused when sharing their learning experiences with visitors to the learning centre.

Overall, strong progress has been made towards addressing this area for improvement.

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

Gillian Frew  
HM Inspector