

23 April 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Aboyne Primary 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 local authority officer, acting headteachers and staff. We heard from senior leaders 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 senior leaders. 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.

Establish effective approaches to evaluate the quality of the school's work.

There has been a high level of instability of leadership in the past year. This has had a negative impact on the pace of progress and improvement since the original inspection. As a result, there has been limited progress made in this area since the original inspection.

The local authority has appointed experienced senior leaders to lead the school on a temporary basis. The local authority has made a commitment to staff and parents that the acting headteachers will remain in post until June 2024. A local authority officer is actively involved in the school leadership team to provide much needed continuity. The local authority should continue its efforts to recruit a permanent headteacher.

Acting senior leaders have introduced a more robust approach to measure the quality of children's learning experiences and the work of the school this session. They are beginning to regularly monitor learning, teaching and children's progress. This is beginning to improve how staff review school improvement priorities. Senior leaders observe learning and teaching, review children's work, discuss teachers' planning and individual children's progress with teachers more regularly. Staff welcome this more robust approach to measuring the quality of children's learning experiences and the work of the school. Senior leaders now need to develop further these approaches across the school and nursery. They should ensure all staff are fully included in evaluating the quality of the school and nursery's work to ensure sustained improvement in learning and teaching.

Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure a consistently high quality for all children across the school. This should include reviewing approaches to planning for each curriculum area to ensure children experience progression in their learning.

The overall quality of learning, teaching and assessment is beginning to improve. Staff need to build on this positive start to increase the pace of change to further improve children's learning.

Staff have reviewed the classroom environments to ensure that all classrooms are welcoming and calm. As planned, they should continue to review environments further to support the

needs of all children. They have enhanced learning walls to support children to learn in literacy and numeracy. Staff have developed a whole school statement which identifies the key features of effective learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers have engaged in professional learning to develop their understanding of high-quality learning and teaching. This is beginning to lead to improvements in children's learning experiences across the school. All staff should now identify and agree clearly the approaches they should use to further improve learning and teaching across the school. Staff have developed an agreed set of standards for children's written work and senior leaders regularly monitor how effectively children are meeting these standards. As a result, the quality and consistency of children's written work is improving across the school.

Senior leaders have developed a clear annual calendar for assessing children's progress. Teachers use a range of assessments across the year to inform their judgements of children's progress and attainment. They have made a positive start to moderating children's work and are developing a shared understanding of children's progress in writing. All staff need to develop further approaches to assessing children's learning and progress. They need to ensure they assess how well children use their skills and knowledge in a range of relevant learning experiences.

Senior leaders and teachers have recently developed helpful progression frameworks to plan children's learning across the curriculum. Teachers are using these new approaches, with increasing understanding, to plan learning to support children to make better progress in literacy and numeracy. Teachers now need to plan children's learning across the curriculum which enables children to experience progression in their learning. Older children have a few opportunities to identify what they already know and what they would like to learn next within a chosen context. This is helping them to become more motivated and engaged in their learning. Across the school, teachers need to support all children to clearly identify what they know and set clear, measurable next steps for learning. They need to engage all children in influencing what and how they will learn across the curriculum.

Improve children's learning experiences, progress, and attainment across all areas of the curriculum, particularly in literacy and English language and numeracy and mathematics.

Children's learning experiences are improving. However, staff need to increase the pace of improvement to ensure this improves children's progress and attainment. Staff are at the early stages of identifying with rigour children's progress and attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics.

Senior leaders have invested in high quality resources to support learning and teaching in literacy and numeracy. Across the school, children need to experience a wider range of learning experiences, including learning outdoors. Teachers provide lessons which are mostly directed to the whole class. Children now need greater opportunities to learn and work together during lessons. Teachers use digital technology regularly to enhance teaching, but children are not yet regularly accessing a range of digital technologies to support and enhance their learning and skills. Teachers at the early stages are developing learning through play. Children benefit from environments which provide opportunities for them to be creative and curious in their play and learning. Teachers should continue to engage with national guidance to further develop play at early level. Across the school, all children need to

be more actively involved in their learning. They do not yet have enough opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills.

Senior leaders have developed a new system to track and check children's progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. This is helping them to gather more accurate data about children's progress and attainment. Senior leaders need to ensure they continue to gather data regularly and with rigour to inform how they support children and raise attainment further. They need to accelerate children's progress to raise attainment further and at a faster pace.

Improve approaches to promoting and supporting positive relationships and behaviour across the school.

Relationships and behaviour across the school have significantly improved. Staff have taken positive steps to improve approaches to promoting and supporting positive behaviour.

Staff have developed very recently a clear positive relationships policy linked to children's rights. Senior leaders need to work with parents to ensure they have a clear understanding of this new policy. All staff's expectations of behaviour have increased, and children are clear about what is expected of them. Almost all children now learn in a calm, settled environment.

All staff have engaged in professional learning to develop their understanding of why children show challenging behaviour. They now have a shared, consistent approach to resolving issues and improving children's behaviour. Since the original inspection, there is an increase in the number of children who say that staff and children treat each other with respect.

Children have developed their understanding of bullying behaviour through class lessons and assemblies. There is an improvement in the number of children who say they have never experienced bullying.

Improve approaches to supporting children who need extra help with their learning. This should include a review of the assessment and identification of individual need.

Senior leaders and staff are at the early stages of improving approaches to supporting children who require extra help with their learning.

The acting headteachers and local authority officer have reviewed senior leaders' remits. This has resulted in a strong focus on identifying children's individual needs and supporting all children with their learning. Senior leaders have recently introduced a referral approach to ensure teachers inform them of children who are not making appropriate progress in their learning. They need to make sure this is informed robustly by teachers' assessment of children's progress. Recently, senior leaders have carried out an audit of children's needs across the school. They now have clear information about the needs of all children. Senior leaders should now use the information gathered in the audit to support teachers more effectively to identify and plan appropriate support to meet all children's needs. Senior leaders need to closely monitor the effectiveness and impact of support and interventions.

All teachers have engaged well with professional learning to develop their practice. They have a renewed focus on, and better understanding of, meeting the needs of all learners.

Senior leaders need to ensure all support staff engage with professional learning to support them fully in their work with children who require support. Senior leaders need to ensure support staff have clear information about the individual needs of the children they work with, and the targets children are working towards.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeenshire Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Katharine Crombie
HM Inspector