

3 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In October 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Gilcomstoun 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. 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.

The leadership team should develop a clear strategic direction to guide well-paced leadership of change at all levels. This entails the robust use of self-evaluation, which leads to a shared understanding of strengths, improvement needs and evidence of improved outcomes.

Senior leaders are taking forward their remits better as a result of improved staffing for English and Gaelic Medium Education. An additional deputy headteacher has been appointed. Senior leaders have worked with the school community to agree the vision, values and aims for Gilcomstoun School. Staff and children are beginning to talk about what these mean to them in bringing about change. Senior leaders have set up activities for discussing children's progress with staff, and how well they are improving learning and teaching. Senior leaders' feedback to teachers needs to be more focused on the exact actions which will raise attainment. For teachers in Gaelic Medium Education, senior leaders' feedback is not commenting on the specialist elements of Gaelic. Across the school, staff have engaged in beneficial career-long professional learning to support them in leading change. Their time for working together is better used to support each other in achieving improved outcomes. Teachers are leading priorities connected to literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing that are leading to improvements. Teachers in Gaelic Medium Education have used collaboration with nurseries in other countries to develop very effectively family learning opportunities using digital technology. Children are benefitting from new opportunities to serve on committees, and undertake roles as ambassadors, leaders of learning and as paired readers. This is giving children very early experiences of making decisions. Communications to parents have improved. Parents' strengths and interests should be maximised further in the school's strategic planning for English and Gaelic Medium Education.

As a high priority, develop the curriculum to meet national expectations. This should enable children to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Children should be encouraged and supported to continue with Gaelic Medium Education as they move from primary to secondary.

The school's curriculum in numeracy, literacy, and health and wellbeing is improving. Teachers are working well with staff at Aberdeen Grammar School to plan more challenging

learning for those children who are capable of more demanding work. Most children report that they enjoy their learning as a result of new teaching approaches. Senior leaders have led discussions well with staff, parents and children on the content of the curriculum. An essential next step is to continue building children's knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of the curriculum. Children's learning through projects needs to be more challenging and more focused on developing skills. Commendably in the current school session, more children continued with Gaelic Medium Education as they moved from nursery into P1. There has also been an improved uptake from P7 Gaelic Medium Education to S1 at Hazlehead Academy. At P7, children talk very positively about their engagement with staff at Hazlehead Academy for a learning project through Gaelic. Children spoke about equity barriers to them continuing with Gaelic Medium Education beyond P7. The education authority needs to support parents and children in addressing these so that all children continue with Gaelic Medium Education from primary into secondary.

Build on the most effective practice to ensure high-quality learning, teaching and assessment across the school.

Most teachers, in English and Gaelic Medium Education, have made strong progress in improving learning and teaching. For most of the time, children experience good learning and teaching, with a few occasions being very good. Across the school, teachers have a consistent approach to sharing with children what they will learn. For the most part, children are becoming more aware of how to learn successfully. Going forward, all teachers need to give children high-quality feedback to support them to make the best possible progress. Staff plan well to meet the needs of different groups of learners in most classes. Commendably, at the early level and at the start of the first level, children learning through English demonstrate a high level of independence in their learning. In Gaelic Medium Education, the new staff team have a good understanding of approaches to immersion. Across all stages, they should apply this understanding to meeting national expectations for total immersion as key to raising children's attainment. Across the school, teachers need to fully integrate effective and consistent use of assessment to plan learning and teaching. They have engaged well in sharing standards and expectations for achieving Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy. A similar focus is now required in numeracy.

Give prompt attention to ensuring that the learning needs of children are identified through reliable assessment, and are met through appropriate and timely support. As required, this should include specialist input.

Since the original inspection, senior leaders have strengthened approaches to meeting the differing learning needs of children across the nursery and school. They now have a comprehensive overview of children's needs. Senior leaders, and teaching and support for learning staff, are now allocating more effectively appropriate resources to meet children's learning needs. Almost all individuals and groups of learners are supported well. This includes children for whom English is an additional language, and those who require a more nurturing environment. Specialist support for Gaelic has been extended. Senior leaders need to develop their policy to include addressing additional support needs in Gaelic Medium Education. This should enable children more quickly to access appropriate support. Across the school, a few children and parents report that they do not believe the school deals well with bullying incidents. Staff should finalise the development of the school's positive relationships policy as one way of addressing this.

Raise attainment in literacy and numeracy, as well as in other areas of learning, to enable children to make the best possible progress.

Since the inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress in raising attainment in literacy and numeracy through the medium of Gaelic and English. Senior leaders report an emerging pattern of improvement in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics at P1. In 2019, the majority of children achieved literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics at the appropriate levels of Curriculum for Excellence by the end of P4 and P7. Staff should continue to focus on ensuring that children are making the best possible progress.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress within a year of the inspection. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit. When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with Aberdeen City Council, that we intend to take.

Joan C Esson
HM Inspector