

21 January 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In October 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Auchtertyre Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Highland 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.

Develop mutually respectful relationships between teachers and children in which there are high expectations of learning and behaviour.

Across the primary and nursery class the climate for learning has begun to improve. Relationships are now positive and focused on respect. This focus supports children effectively to feel safe, secure and ready to learn. The improved climate and positive relationships have been strengthened by the extensive work undertaken to address issues raised as barriers to learning in the original inspection.

In the nursery class, appropriate structure, routines and clear expectations are now evident. Children take increased responsibilities and enjoy simple leadership roles. They are responding well to these expectations. Practitioners should continue to develop interesting ways of consulting with children to ensure their views contribute appropriately to ongoing improvement. This should build on positive examples such as children's involvement in the development of the outdoor learning environment.

Partnership work within the school and nursery has resulted in greater clarity around the vision, values and aims. The headteacher has rightly identified that the expectations for values and behaviours as identified in the 'Auchtertyre way' are not yet consistently observed across the school. It will be important to continue to work towards embedding the expectations of calm, motivating classrooms through evaluating the impact of the new approaches with children and staff.

Improvements to how behaviour is being managed positively with increasingly consistent approaches has been noted by staff and children. The majority of children now report that they feel safe and that school is helping them become more confident. More time is needed to develop further and embed these approaches. There is a significant reduction in the number of bullying incidents reported. There appears to be a better understanding of dealing with conflict and helping to manage emotions through a growing range of strategies that children find helpful to them.

All learners now recognise the importance of having an adult to speak to if they have any concerns or worries. Most children report that they are now confident to approach someone of their own choosing. In addition, most children identify the school as helping them to understand and respect other people.

As an important priority, develop a clear strategic direction to guide improvements, high standards and well-paced change as a responsibility of all. All staff should be making robust and regular use of self-evaluation. This should lead to a shared understanding of what the school is doing well and needs to improve.

Across the school and nursery, staff need to adopt an increasingly outward looking approach to self-evaluation in order to measure accurately the impact of changes undertaken. Practitioners in the nursery should continue to build on the positive pace of change and ensure the potential within the refreshed environment and practitioner team is maximised.

All primary staff are involved in practitioner enquiries to help build confidence in a variety of important areas linked to aspects of learning and teaching. They should build upon this positive start, share what is working well and support new staff to ensure consistency and shared understanding of learning and teaching approaches.

The school is not yet harnessing the full potential of partnership working with parents. Parents are willing to be involved more fully in the improvement journey of the school. It is important that consultation with parents is valued and their views taken into consideration. In order to build on the existing positive partnerships with families it is important to ensure a strategic approach to consultation and communication.

As a high priority, develop the curriculum to meet national expectations. This should ensure that children build appropriately on their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Children need to be more aware of their own progress and next steps in learning.

The curriculum remains at an early stage of development. As approaches to curriculum delivery continue to develop these need to be underpinned by a clear, shared rationale reflecting the unique context of the school community. A few improvements are beginning to emerge in the nursery. Practitioners document what children already know and what they want to learn through the use of mind mapping approaches. This is helping form the basis of planning for learning.

In the primary stages, staff have recently introduced an agreed format for planning for learning across all curricular areas. Some work has begun to prepare to track wider achievements. This needs to be reviewed for relevance and developed across the school to help inform planning as well as celebrating success and supporting homework activities. Religious and moral education is provided and the school is now meeting their requirements for religious observance. Health and wellbeing outcomes have been revised and the headteacher has rightly identified this as a priority for focus as the responsibility of all. This will involve taking better account of the many areas contributing to the programme.

The use of digital technologies remains too limited. Technology is not yet used to extend and enrich learning or support the development and application of skills. Considerable potential remains for the development of shared work across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. Staff should build on and increase shared learning opportunities.

Ensure a more strategic approach to improving learning, teaching and assessment, with teachers taking more responsibility for ensuring high-quality delivery. This should result in the learning needs of all children being met, including those who require specialist support.

There has been significant improvement to the nursery class learning environments, particularly outdoors. Levels of engagement and purposeful play are significantly improved in the outdoor area. Practitioners should now ensure similar success to the indoor play experiences. This should include an increased focus on open-ended, natural resources as resourcing allows to build on, creativity, inquiry and investigation. The benefits of quality outdoor learning experiences in the nursery are not yet being built upon in the primary stages.

In the primary, all staff and children have been involved in developing an understanding on what makes a good lesson. Monitoring visits including peer observations provide helpful feedback to staff. Staff are now more eager to discuss practice and are improving their approaches to reflect more effectively on what works well and what leads to improved learning. Overall, the quality of lessons is not yet consistently high enough.

Across the school and nursery, appropriate procedures are now in place to support the identification of children who experience barriers to their learning. Where appropriate, additional planning is put in place. The school should consider how it can increase the effectiveness of targeted interventions and ensure the needs of all children are met. Information from recently introduced tracking systems and other data would provide a strong basis for the identification of groups. This will also support better the targeting and impact of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) interventions.

Ensure prompt and structured action to raise children's attainment in literacy and numeracy, as well as in other areas of learning. This should focus on helping children make the best possible progress.

Practitioners recognise the potential for learning afforded by the implementation of extended hours for nursery children. This provides new opportunities to secure increased progress in learning that subsequently impacts on the raising of attainment. There is scope to develop literacy and numeracy learning opportunities both outdoors and indoors.

In the primary reading for pleasure is not evident but the recent changes to the creation of an attractive library may provide a stimulus to support change. Progress in numeracy is heavily dependent on text book approaches. Staff have worked across the school and cluster looking at children's writing. Staff are beginning to become more confident in understanding the standards children are expected to achieve.

There is scope to review and refresh staff remits to build capacity within the staff team and raise attainment. This would help enable staff to understand their roles and responsibilities in maximising attainment. There is some improvement in literacy and numeracy but overall it is too early to know if this can be sustained. The headteacher uses a range of attainment data to inform current and predicted levels of attainment. It is important that swift action is taken to identify relevant gaps and address issues effectively. The school continues to have staffing issues that impact on the timeliness of support.

More time and support is needed to realise the challenges identified in the original inspection.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with The Highland Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. A progress report 12 months after publication will be undertaken by the authority. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within 18 months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with The Highland 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.

Mary Ann Hagan
HM Inspector