

24 April 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

**Alford Primary School
Aberdeenshire Council**

In August 2015, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in March 2017. 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

Put in place much more robust support systems to meet the needs of all children.

The acting headteacher has now been in post for 18 months. In that time there have been substantial improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in place, through the provision of improved tasks, activities and resources. In the nursery, practitioners continue to be caring, responsive and demonstrate a good understanding of children's needs. As a result there is a nurturing and inclusive ethos. This supports children to be confident and increasingly independent. Children in the nursery class are beginning to take more active leadership roles. Recently an interest in sea life has engaged them in learning about recycling and caring for the environment. They shared this learning enthusiastically throughout the primary school. There is scope as planned, to focus further on the quality of next steps for learning allowing children, parents and staff to evaluate children's progress together. Staff in the nursery should maximise opportunities for children to continue to develop their leadership skills.

At the primary stages, tasks, activities and resources have improved greatly since the previous inspection. All classroom resources are much more accessible now for learners. In the majority of classes, learning activities meet the children's varying needs. Parents, staff and children all report that staff are very welcoming. Learning and teaching is more fun and more challenging. Teachers know the children well, building relationships that are now very positive. Children collaborate better in groups as well as working well individually. Support staff provide well-considered

support for children with additional support needs. The headteacher and other senior leaders continue to improve and organise the management of all information to meet better the needs of every child. Behaviour management in classes is now much improved across the school. Tracking and monitoring has improved since the last inspection with all learners tracked carefully, enabling staff to set better targets to improve learning and teaching standards. Further work needs to be done to ensure pace and challenge are appropriate for every learner, especially at the early stages in the primary school. Staff should ensure that parents and learners are always clear about the skills children are developing and the next steps they need to take to improve further. Bullying or other complaints are now tracked and monitored very well.

Develop further approaches to self-evaluation to ensure continuing school improvement.

The acting headteacher is a very conscientious and creative professional who wants to see all children improve. Her open door policy and keenness to offer support to staff when requested is appreciated by all staff. The acting headteacher and depute head teachers know the children well and the support they provide for all learners and staff is recognised by parents. Staff understand their responsibility to work to improve the life chances of every child in their care. Support staff play a very important role in the life of the school. They enhance learning and nurture children effectively. There is now a clearer vision, values and aims to take the school forward. At the nursery stages practitioners are beginning to take more ownership of self-evaluation. The nursery team are now using a wider range of strategies to involve parents in sharing their views. Parents comment increasingly on children's profiles and learning stories giving 'two stars and a wish' about what they think the team can do to improve. The headteacher, depute head teachers and staff at the primary stages now show a clear commitment to the use and further development of self-evaluation. Staff are part of an improving culture of reflective practitioners who are committed to school improvement. Most staff now evaluate the quality of their work better. Nursery and primary staff can benefit from shared visits to other nurseries and primary schools to share ideas together and develop their skills and confidence further.

At the primary stages, the curriculum has improved and children and parents appreciate the enhanced quality of learning provided, for example, in maths, science music and art and design. The school and the nursery should continue to develop further opportunities to develop family learning. Parents are already supporting the children well through, for example assisting in creative craft activities and through the positive support of the parent council. In the primary school, the local authority is taking steps to appoint a new leadership team after a period of uncertainty for staff and parents. This will offer the school stability as it moves forward and enable all staff to engage further in well-paced improvements.

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 Aberdeenshire Council that we intend to take.

Aileen Monaghan
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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