

5 March 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In January 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Croy 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 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.

Improve the pace of change across the whole-school community to help children make the best possible progress.

Across the whole school, including the nursery class, there have been significant improvements in this area since the original inspection. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear vision of improvement for Croy Primary School. This vision is underpinned by accurate self-evaluation, through a well-planned pace of change. The headteacher is highly respected by staff, parents and children. The headteacher and staff acknowledge that the school is on a journey of improvement. There are well-planned actions for improvement, with appropriate timescales.

There is now a much improved culture. This is reflected in the calm and respectful ethos, of staff and children who are happy to be in school and well placed to learn. Core values of respect, learning and happiness underpin the work of the school. Standards of behaviour, expectations and the quality of work have all improved since the original inspection. Across the nursery class and primary stages, the headteacher and all staff have worked extremely hard to improve further the quality of experiences for the children.

In the nursery, practitioners have had a key leadership role in implementing the nursery action plan, created as a result of areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection. They have made many positive changes under the supportive leadership of the headteacher, who views the nursery as an important aspect of the school. As a result, the pace of change has increased and the quality of children's experiences has continued to improve. Practitioners and children have greater involvement in many aspects of the life of the school. The headteacher regularly monitors the work of the nursery. As a result, practitioners are becoming confident in their role and are clear about the nursery strengths and areas where further improvement is required. Practitioners will continue to benefit from strategic guidance from the senior leadership team. This support should have a particular focus on the effective use of planning, assessment, and the tracking and monitoring the progress children are making.

Across the primary stages, all aspects have improved since the original inspection. Staff report confidence in their role in the school improvement journey. Leadership at all levels is undertaken enthusiastically by members of staff through a variety of opportunities, including,

for example, emerging literacy, digital technology, citizenship groups. Pupil support assistants (PSAs) also take on new leadership roles. Pupil voice is included in any improvement. Actions are responded to and reported back on. There are strong partnerships with parents and the Friends of Croy Parent Council. Parents have appreciated the enhanced communication, through various means such as newsletters, use of social media and the online sharing tool, which is reported to be highly valuable for two-way communication. Parents have reported that the school is very approachable for any queries, which are followed up. As planned, the school should continue to develop the role of pupil voice and children leading improvements.

To support leadership at all levels to secure improvements across the school and nursery there is a need to strengthen approaches to self-evaluation and strategic planning. This should ensure consistent high-quality learning and teaching and well-paced change. As part of this work, the school should continue to develop the curriculum to help children make better progress and raise attainment.

There is clear evidence of significant improvement, based on strong approaches to self-evaluation and strategic planning. The headteacher, the recently appointed principal teacher, and all staff are all taking ownership of the school's improvement journey.

Nursery practitioners are reflective and strive to do their very best for children. They have improved the layout of the playroom, children have greater choice and resources are more accessible. As a result, children are independent and confidently seek out the materials and tools they require to support their play. While the level of challenge for children is improving, there is still scope to develop this further. During the visit, limited use was made of digital technology. Practitioners are fully aware that this continues to be an area for development. To ensure continuous improvement, practitioners will benefit from support from the senior leadership team to engage in more robust self-evaluation. This will enable practitioners to look more critically at their practice and demonstrate the impact of change.

In the primary stages, national guidance such as 'How Good is Our School? (4th Edition)' is now used constantly in self-evaluation activities, auditing and supporting improvements. There is now clear and accurate self-evaluation, informing actions for improvement. Formal processes for monitoring are in place. There is now a clear vision for the school's improvement journey. The school should continue with developments as planned.

Throughout the primary stages, behaviour is of a high standard and children are willing and keen to learn. There are very positive relationships between staff and children. Children's listening skills have improved considerably and an ethos of respect is evident throughout the school. Learning and teaching is of a more consistent and stronger quality throughout the school. Staff continue to create positive and enjoyable environments for learning. In the best practice, learning and teaching is of a very high quality, well differentiated and appropriately paced for children. The school should continue to build on this best practice, particularly in relation to pace of learning and challenge for high-attaining learners. On occasions, children could be offered more ownership and independence in their learning.

The curriculum has been revised and, as a result, learning now takes much more account of the local context of the school. Examples include relevant learning in relation to the Jacobites and research linked to local history. Transitions between classes have improved, supported

by stronger planning, monitoring and tracking of learning. Skills for learning, life and work are more prominent now. For example, through the P7 enterprising work to organise the Santa Dash, linked to learning, which was very well supported by parents and the wider community. The school should continue with plans for further development of outdoor learning and partnership opportunities to support learning. The use of digital technology at the primary stages has improved since the original inspection. The school is now better resourced in this area, including through additional funding from the 'Friends of Croy' Parent Council. Children undertake activities such as coding, through strong partnerships with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).

Attainment has remained steady overall and has shown signs of improvement in particular areas of literacy and numeracy, with most children on track to achieve predictions of higher levels by the end of session. Teachers' confidence in professional judgement of Curriculum for Excellence levels has improved. Moderation has supported sharing of standards. The Pupil Equity Fund has been utilised well to deploy an additional PSA, with a focus on supporting children in phonics and literacy. As identified, the school should continue to participate in moderation activities with colleagues within and outwith Croy Primary School. Along with continuing to develop approaches to assessment and reporting, this will help to continue to raise attainment for all.

Continue to put rigorous arrangements in place to assist those who need support in their learning and development. This includes the need to regularly check that children are being well supported.

Led very effectively by the headteacher and additional support needs (ASN) specialist teacher, the school has improved significantly the arrangements to meet the needs of children. Systems and processes are now effective, clearly understood by all, and are leading to better outcomes for children. The ASN teacher has brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the school. She carries out the various support for learning roles very effectively, including working directly with children; offering advice to individual teachers; co-ordinating whole-staff professional learning on specific areas; and ensuring that systems and record keeping are thorough and continuously maintained.

Teachers are much clearer about their role in identifying where children are experiencing barriers to learning. Appropriate additional support is targeted to assist individuals and groups. As planned, staff should continue to share and research good practice in ensuring that high-achieving children are appropriately challenged in their learning. PSAs are deployed effectively, according to the needs of individuals and groups of children. They provide valuable support to children and teachers. The school works effectively with partner agencies to support individual children and families. As part of the monitoring process, the senior leadership team should ensure nursery children's care plans include all relevant and up to date information.

Overall, focusing on improving the health and wellbeing and morale of the children and adults alike has been a key priority for the headteacher. The ethos of the school has significantly improved in recent months, with a calm, purposeful and respectful atmosphere now evident in all classes, lessons and activities. In the pre-inspection questionnaires for this visit, almost all children gave positive responses about behaviour, safety, respect, fairness and how they

feel they are treated by each other. This is a marked improvement from children's responses at the original inspection.

Children demonstrate the school's values in the daily interactions with one another, and in their overall positive attitudes to learning. The headteacher should continue, as planned, to develop staff and children's knowledge and awareness of equality and diversity, including protected characteristics, through relevant learning.

What happens next?

The school has made very 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. The Highland Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Sally Stewart
HM Inspector