

28 March 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

**Alford Primary School and Nursery Class
Aberdeenshire Council**

In May 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. 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. 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.

At the time of this inspection the new acting headteacher has been in post for around five months. The school has now moved into a brand new purpose built building as part of a longer transition towards being an all through 3-18 school. Across the school, children now enjoy daily opportunities to learn in a much more positive learning environment. In the nursery, child-led activities are supporting children increasingly to develop their own ideas within their play. There is an improving balance between adult and child led activities. A few children write their own name confidently and are very interested in counting. They need more play based opportunities to apply and further develop their skills. Children in the nursery will also benefit from more challenging activities in outdoor learning. At the primary stages, children are beginning to take more responsibility for their learning through for example their use of digital learning. This includes the use of apps for numeracy. Children told us they could be working much harder at a faster pace and at a higher level of learning. Across the school, teachers need to ensure that tasks and activities for all children are set at the right level of difficulty. Staff need to be able to adjust tasks as appropriate with clearly timed targets and clear deadlines. Staff should also plan more to ensure they are meeting the learning needs of more able children in their class consistently. The learning support base is used more flexibly now through better timetabled and targeted support for children who may encounter barriers to their learning. Staff are beginning to develop their work better in partnership with parents including the use of helpful family consultations. The

headteacher and other senior leaders have moved quickly to improve and reorganise the management of all information to better meet the needs of every child. A few parents and children reported that behaviour management in classes is still not yet effective across the school. Further work is needed to help all children understand the standards of behaviour required and to ensure that all staff are supported further to deliver learning that meets everyone's needs. Staff are working to finalise a better recording system for any instances of bullying. In addition staff understand the need to provide more anti-bullying activities in class to support all children.

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

The new acting headteacher has been in post for around five months. In her short time leading the school, she has already established herself as an effective leader who is passionate about trying to ensure that every child in the school has the best life chances. The aims and vision of the new nursery and primary classes are already understood by the learners and supported by staff, pupils and parents. Led by the experienced deputy, and principal teacher for early years, staff in the nursery are beginning now to share their reflections about children's learning and ideas to improve the learning environment. At the primary stages, there is a need for further curricular planning and additional development of learning and teaching in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Tracking and monitoring of learning by all staff needs to be much more rigorous. They need to set clear on-going targets for improvement and enable children to understand what skills they are developing. The school and the nursery should continue to develop further opportunities for parents to participate in school improvement. Parents are already supporting the children through, for example assisting in creative craft activities. In partnership with staff, they should now be encouraged to develop an understanding of family learning and what it can look like. The senior leadership team understands the need to develop the leadership skills of every child and every staff member to speed up the pace of school improvement in all areas. All staff take part in relevant professional development activities and demonstrate a keenness to develop their own learning further.

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 in approximately one year's time. 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.

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.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.