

8 May 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

**Mortlach Primary School
The Moray Council**

In February 2014, 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 Moray Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in April 2016. 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.

Improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.

- Nursery practitioners have made some improvements to children's experiences to help support them to make better progress in their learning. There is now an increased focus on developing children's skills in literacy and numeracy. Most children continue to develop their skills in talking and listening. They share their views and opinions with adults and other children. Children engage with older children from the primary stages when they join community groups to encourage them to put forward views. Others are developing their early reading skills and a few can identify their name in print. Children now develop their early writing skills throughout the nursery and there are a few examples of children's emergent writing displayed in the nursery environment. Children can now access books on their own.
- Most nursery children are developing their counting skills. Others are starting to recognise basic shapes. A few children use mathematical language when playing. There continues to be a need to improve approaches to support children to make better progress in literacy and numeracy. Children need more opportunities to develop and apply their skills across the playroom and outdoors. Too often opportunities are missed to promote children's skills in rich and appropriate contexts. Practitioners also need to continue to review their approaches in terms of how they monitor and evaluate children's progress in order to have a better overview of how well all children make progress in their learning.

- In the primary school, staff have introduced new progressive pathways to support progression in literacy and numeracy. In addition, termly tracking and monitoring meetings with the headteacher provides an opportunity for staff to discuss in detail each child's progress. Clearer learning intentions and writing success criteria with children is promoting more successful ways for children to be involved in assessing their own progress. Reflective logs and conversations with peers and staff provide children with worthwhile opportunities to plan their next steps in learning. Overall, there are good examples of children setting their own targets. Across the school, children are being given more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. This has impacted positively on children's engagement in learning
- Staff in the primary classes have introduced a considerable number of new approaches and initiatives to help raise children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. As such, it will be important that new developments are kept under close review to ensure they have the desired impact on children's attainment. Time is needed to fully embed new approaches and initiatives. Staff need to continue to develop their confidence in making sound professional judgments about learners' progress.

Improve the quality of the curriculum ensuring a more consistent high-quality learning experience for children at all stages.

- The acting headteacher has introduced guidance on all areas within Curriculum for Excellence to help nursery practitioners plan and deliver experiences. They are taking more account of children's interests when planning curricular experiences and taking more account of learning experiences and starting to use these to help track children's progress. Further work is needed to develop high-quality learning across the curriculum. Nursery practitioners still need to develop their understanding of planning for different children, ensuring that learning activities match different needs.
- The acting headteacher has given clear direction to the work of the school. A strong focus has been given to improving the curriculum. Although this is still very much at an initial stage of development there are early indications that new approaches are having a positive impact on children's learning experiences and the progress they are making. Staff now have a clearer understanding of the purpose of the curriculum and what they hope to achieve for learners in Mortlach Primary School. Staff have made positive attempts to design a curriculum that takes better account of the unique context of the school. It is also important that staff continue to develop the curriculum as experienced by learners to ensure the curriculum is broad, balanced, progressive and relevant for all learners.

Improve leadership for self-evaluation and approaches to tracking children's progress.

- Together, the acting headteacher and principal teacher are providing much needed leadership and direction for the school. Across the school staff are demonstrating great commitment and enthusiasm to support school

improvement. The school has also benefitted from the very strong support they have received from their local authority Quality Improvement Officer (QIO).

- In the nursery class, a positive start and engagement with national guidance has been made. These approaches now need to be continued to ensure a coherent approach to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. Reflection Logs in the nursery class to illustrate children's learning and attainment are at early stages of development. The identification of significant learning and next steps are not yet identified.
- In the primary classes, staff have made good use of national guidance to support them to have a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and main areas for improvement. Staff report that they now have a stronger role in helping to improve key areas within the school. Children also enjoy a greater role in supporting school improvement. Changes have been made to the pupil community groups to afford more opportunities for children to be involved in interesting school developments. We have discussed ways in which this could be developed further to enable children to have more meaningful ways to support improvement in the school and community.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress within one 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, The Moray Council or Education Scotland will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with The Moray Council, that we intend to take.

Jackie Maley
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.