28 April 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

Arbirlot Primary School and Nursery Class
Angus Council

Recently, as you may know, my colleague and I inspected your child’s school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school’s successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school’s recent work, including outdoor learning in the nursery; and partnership working with Carmyllie Primary School. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children are learning well and they are very proud of their school and community. Children in the nursery are settled and know their routines well. They are becoming independent and are confident working with older children, forming friendships, learning to take turns and share. They particularly enjoy their role play in the pirate topic and their daily experiences outdoors. Nursery staff now need to develop ways in which children can plan and take more responsibility for their own learning to further increase independence in learning. At the primary stages children are engaged, motivated and confident, interacting very well with each other and with adults. Teacher-pupil relationships are very positive. Children are very well-behaved and attentive during lessons. They have regular opportunities to be active in their learning and work well both independently and in groups. Children across all stages of the school work very well together, older children help younger ones particularly well. Children are developing their problem-solving skills and are learning in different ways. This includes, for example, agreeing approaches as a group or using everyone’s skills to plan and develop their new school library area to make it a positive experience and encourage a love of reading. Enabling children to be more involved in jointly creating learning intentions and success criteria in lessons will help them to take even more responsibility for planning their own learning. Joint working with Carmyllie Primary School supports children to undertake broader experiences, develop interpersonal and social skills, including the formation of friendships with a wider group of peers.

Children are achieving well in the school and nursery. Across the school almost all children are making good progress in their literacy and English language and in numeracy and mathematics. Almost all children talk and listen very well, showing respect for the views and opinions of others. They are confident when sharing their
work and presenting to others, for example in class lessons or at assemblies. In the nursery there is now a need to extend children’s skills in early literacy. Throughout the school children are achieving well in different areas of the curriculum, for example at the early stages through their work on the Egyptians, or science in the upper stages, using fruits and vegetables to investigate properties of circuits. Children’s achievements are emphasised and celebrated throughout the school, including through their ‘wonderful work’ books and wall display, which the children are proud of. Across the school, to continue to raise attainment, and to help children make even better progress, staff should develop further the way they assess and track children’s learning in all curricular areas. Children are developing their citizenship skills well, through every child contributing to discussions and activities, such as planning for book week. Children are very knowledgeable about all aspects of sustainability, the school having achieved their Eco-Schools Scotland green flag in 2013. Children across the school and nursery are developing an understanding of healthy lifestyles.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Across the school and nursery, staff support children well. Staff are very aware of and responsive to children’s individual learning needs. Almost all tasks are appropriate to children’s level of ability. Visiting teachers, parents and volunteers all work very well with teachers to help children develop and learn. In the nursery, staff observe children at play and use these observations to plan their next steps in learning. Children in the nursery would benefit from a few tasks being more challenging. Across the nursery and primary stages the school works well with various partners, including health partners and the services family liaison teacher, to support individual needs. Across the nursery and primary stages consideration should be given to creating individual education plans as appropriate, in order to target, track and review specific areas of need.

Across the school, children benefit from a broad curriculum. The headteacher and staff have developed strong teaching and learning programmes. The curriculum includes a wide range of experiences such as sporting and musical activities and regular out-of-school visits to enhance learning. A residential trip is undertaken by children in the senior stages of school, jointly with other schools in the area, to support children’s skills and development in areas such as teamwork, independence and leadership. The use of the outdoors is a strong feature of the nursery, offering children regular opportunities to learn about their environment and local community. Parents and partners, such as Angus College, have supported the development of the nursery outdoor area. Although there are some limitations with internet access, digital technology is used well in the primary stages. Across the school strong partnerships with parents and the community support extended opportunities for children, for example the recent jointly planned Christmas Fayre and fund-raising events. Given the location of the school, staff work well to develop links and joint working with other schools, particularly Carmyllie Primary School. This could now be developed further, including through the use of digital technologies, to enhance learning. Arrangements for children starting nursery, primary and for those moving to secondary school are well-organised.
How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher provides strong leadership for the school and is highly respected. She has a clear vision for the school, and has led the school through a period of change. This has resulted in improved learning and teaching methodologies and planned progressive development of the Curriculum for Excellence through self-evaluation processes. All of this has had a positive impact on improving children’s learning and achievements. The headteacher uses a range of approaches to evaluate and improve aspects of the school’s work. Staff are very committed to school improvement. All members of staff work very well as a team and report that there are high levels of trust and support throughout the school. Support staff play a valuable role in enhancing children’s experiences. The headteacher should now include the nursery more in formal self-evaluation activities. The school asks parents and children what they think about how they are doing, and use the feedback received to bring about improvement. Children are involved in regular self and peer assessment activities in evaluating their work and the work of others. A child-friendly improvement plan is in place with children able to report on actions taken. Almost all parents are very happy with the school. There are very strong partnerships between the school and the Parent Council. To support the school to improve further, more members of staff should now lead and develop aspects of the school’s work, including through sharing good practice with each other and other schools. Further involvement of children, parents, staff and other partners in evaluating aspects of the school’s work will support continued improvement.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Well-behaved, friendly and confident children who want to do their best and show a strong school identity.
- The quality of learning experiences in the primary stages and very good use of the outdoors in the nursery to support and enhance learning.
- A strong, cohesive staff team which works very well together and is keen to improve the school.
- Leadership of the headteacher in supporting school improvement.

We discussed with staff and Angus Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Extend consistency of use of self-evaluation from nursery to P7 to ensure children’s experiences and achievements continue to improve.
- Develop further links and joint working with other schools, including through the use of digital technologies, to enhance learning.
- Continue to improve the curriculum.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Angus Council will inform parents about the school’s progress.
Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/ArbirlotPrimarySchoolAngus.asp

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 0141 282 5000, 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.