

10 September 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

### **Total French School, Aberdeen**

HM Inspectors recently visited Total French School. The visit was part of our quality improvement and professional engagement visits with independent schools which complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based on the school's self-evaluation and priorities identified for school improvement. During our visit inspectors talked to staff and young people and worked together with the headteacher (HT) and senior staff about the planned developments to ensure outcomes for children and young people continue to improve.

#### **How well does the school ensure outcomes for children/young people continue to improve?**

In August 2018, the Total French School re-located to premises within Albyn School in Aberdeen. At the time of our visit, the school was still in the fairly early stages of this transition and merger with Albyn School. Senior leaders and governors have quickly established agreed short term actions to ensure quality of learners' wellbeing and learning experiences. Commendably, senior leaders have helpfully prioritised and established agreed systems for responsibility of key areas for self-evaluation and quality assurance. Both the HT of Albyn School and the HT of the Total French School have identified continuous self-evaluation as key to the success of the amalgamation of the two schools. Going forward, it would be helpful to incorporate a more formal evaluation process, which consults all stakeholders.

The school has a very caring ethos. From the outset, the importance of the children and young people from the Total French School feeling included and involved in whole school life has been a key priority. This informed the discussions which led to the amalgamation of the Total French School and Albyn School. Staff in the Total French School know their learners well and they provide a nurturing learning environment in which children and young people flourish. At all stages children and young people are enthusiastic and highly motivated learners. Young people contribute to the life of the school by acting as buddies to younger children. They demonstrated considerable leadership skills while participating in the interdisciplinary project on Fraternisations during the First World War. There is scope for the school to provide additional leadership opportunities for children and young people, who are articulate and very proud of their school and their learning. Children and young people enjoy the more varied curriculum that is available to them at Albyn School and the opportunities to take part in more creative activities, as well as a wider range of sports. They appreciate the broad range of opportunities for personal achievement, including lunch time and after school clubs.

Children and young people participate willingly in French and in English classes and work very well with their peers from Albyn School. The school has provided very good support for

pupils' language skills and other needs throughout the period of transition by appointing additional French-speaking support staff and teaching assistants.

Children in the Lower School work hard and enjoy their learning. There is a warm, friendly environment and children relate well to their teachers. Lessons are designed to encourage children's curiosity for learning. In English medium classes, where children learn alongside their English speaking peers, they work very well together and teachers encourage a culture of children helping each other to be successful in their learning. They are fully integrated in lessons and work very well with their Albyn peers.

In the Upper School, young people are respectful, well behaved and most are highly articulate in both French and English. They have a very positive attitude to their learning and show curiosity, playing an active part in their lessons. They work with maturity and independence and interact very positively with their teachers and their peers. They identify strongly with the school ethos and values. Young people experience a broad range of curricular options, including a range of opportunities to develop their skills outwith the mainstream French curriculum. These opportunities create a unique offer to young people. The merger is opening up further meaningful curricular opportunities and pathways for young people as they move through the secondary school. Importantly, curricular opportunities allow for young people to reintegrate to mainstream French secondary education and also the possibility of accessing French or Scottish higher education.

Across the Lower and Upper Schools, staff gather a wealth of information about children's and young people's progress, attainment and achievement. Teachers have a very good knowledge of pupils' pastoral needs and academic progress. The Total French School works very closely with the French education system. Examination results are sent off on a yearly basis to the French school inspectorate. Each pupil's annual report, which represents the learning across the whole school, is sent to the French Embassy for formal endorsement. This means that pupils can continue to the next level in any setting within the French national education system. This supports a continual focus on attainment as children and young people move on from the school. The amalgamation has provided valuable curricular opportunities for young people, although it is too early to comment on attainment within the hybrid curriculum. Young people from the Total French School move on to a variety of destinations, including other Mission Laïque Française (MLF) schools around the world, schools in France and higher education in both the UK and France.

Before the merger in August 2018, the Board of Governors for Total French School placed a high priority in finding a partner who, in addition to supporting the delivery of the French curriculum, would also closely reflect their core values of respect and excellence. The HT of the Total French School meets regularly with the senior leadership team and participates in the regular weekly meetings. The Board of Governors meets three times per year with the HT. Together they review aspects of provision, for example health and safety, the amalgamation process, school activities and set fees. The handbook which sets out the governing principles of the Total French School is currently being updated to reflect the move to Albyn School.

Parents who engaged with HM Inspectors spoke very positively about the overall benefits of the recent merger of the Total French School with Albyn School. They recognise that a key strength of the newly merged school is the provision of a broad and unique international experience, which is nonetheless underpinned by the attributes of the French national

education system. Parents expressed the view that the Total French School prepares children and young people very well for reintegration to the mainstream French system.

Children and young people have a known point of contact, both in the Total French School and also within their wider school experiences within Albyn School. Helpful cards in French and English and an information leaflet for parents make clear what steps learners should take. Support for learning needs are clearly identified and monitored. Planned learning experiences meet well the needs of children who require further support to be successful in their learning. There is also ongoing flexible support for those children and young people who may require additional support with English in order to access aspects of the curriculum.

All safeguarding and child protection matters fall under the auspices of Albyn School. This decision was made early on in the preparation for the amalgamation. This has ensured that the processes and lines of responsibility were clear from the outset to all staff, pupils and parents. There are clear and shared policies and processes. The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children and young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

We are confident the school has the necessary arrangements and procedures in place to ensure continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and board of governors will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the progress of the school.

Jacqueline Gallagher  
HM Inspector

Additional evidence for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-reports/aberdeen-city/5280834>