

26 January 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

### **Albyn School, Aberdeen**

In June 2015, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and young people and worked closely with the headmaster and staff. We heard from the headmaster and other staff how the school has continued to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified during our previous visit and at other aspects of the school's work discussed during the opening scoping meeting. As a result, we were able to find out how well children and young people are now learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found.

#### **How well do children and young people learn and achieve?**

Young people learn and achieve very well at Albyn school. They are polite, friendly, well-motivated and very keen to do well. They are proud of their school. Across all parts of the nurseries, children continue to benefit from high quality learning experiences. They are motivated by their play activities and they cooperate very well with one another. Across the Lower school, children continue to benefit from high-quality learning and teaching in a calm and purposeful environment. Children show confidence in knowing themselves as learners and understand what they have to do next to improve. They are able to talk about this reflectively with their peers and teachers. Children show great confidence in using tablet devices to support many aspects of their learning, from research to word processing. At Lower 5, children do this very well to find out about animals as part of their work on 'Extreme Survivors'. Children are showing a strong awareness of detailed historical research. For example, in Lower 6, children are developing an understanding of life in Victorian times through their learning walk around Aberdeen. In the Upper school young people are benefiting from a very supportive learning environment. They respond positively to the high expectations placed upon them in terms of participation, engagement and progress with their learning. Across the school, staff have very warm, positive relationships with young people. They help young people to feel safe, included and confident in seeking support when required.

Across the school, young people are achieving a broad range of skills very well. These include important skills for life and work through participation in valuable citizenship initiatives and cultural and sports events. An increasing number of young people are gaining the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Young people continue to benefit from an extensive range of sporting activities which improve their fitness levels and develop positive relationships, for example in skiing, football, hockey,

badminton and rowing. Through participation in an outstanding range of clubs and interest groups, young people are developing social networks, sharing experiences and interests with others and supporting their peers. Opportunities include film clubs, Polish club, gardening club, chess club and Scripture Union. Over a number of years, the school has supported young people from Upper 4 to Upper 6 to achieve very high levels of attainment consistently. Each year, significant numbers of young people leave school having achieved outstanding success in national qualifications including at GCSE and Higher and Advanced Higher. Young people enjoy and benefit from having their achievements recognised and celebrated through a variety of ways including newsletters, and articles in the local and national press. Notice boards and displays around the school strongly promote a culture of celebrating achievements. Teachers are working to involve young people more in planning and reviewing their own learning. This will help young people to take more responsibility for aspects of their learning and increase opportunities for personalisation and choice. We have asked the school to continue to explore ways of increasing pupil voice.

### **How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?**

Across the school, tasks, activities and resources are well matched to meet the needs of almost all children and young people. Lessons are designed to build on prior learning. In the best lessons, children and young people are motivated by stimulating opportunities which are challenging and delivered at a brisk pace. All staff contribute to providing a caring and nurturing environment for learners. Almost all staff have a clear understanding of the needs of learners and the support required to enable them to make progress. Staff continue to provide a range of additional activities and approaches to enhance learning opportunities. This includes supported study classes across almost all subject areas. These classes are highly valued by learners. While digital learning is used effectively in many teaching activities, all staff should continue to evaluate their use of the latest technology to enhance learning. The quality of pastoral care and welfare, particularly support for learning is developing very well and is now a strength throughout the school. Children, young people and their families speak highly of the pastoral support they receive from form tutors, clan heads, and class teachers. Since the previous visit, all staff have received extensive training in protecting children. The school has reviewed and updated their child protection and safeguarding policy and guidance in line with the latest legislation. All staff are fully aware of their responsibilities for protecting children and young people. The Governor leading on safeguarding has undertaken recent training in this area. He is now taking on a more prominent role in providing governance to senior managers and the pastoral committee on child protection and safeguarding issues across the school. Senior managers should continue their recent positive actions to ensure that improving relationships with all members of the school community continue to grow.

The school offers a very broad curriculum across all levels of learning. It is designed to allow all children and young people to develop their intellectual, creative, moral, spiritual, physical and social potential. The curriculum vision and rationale aims to create children and young people who are confident, self-motivated learners who enjoy learning. Staff encourage learning where children and young people can

achieve high standards of attainment and achievement within a community of Christian values in a safe and healthy environment. Children and young people contribute positively to the life and ethos of the school. They have opportunities to learn through a very broad range of subjects, and benefit from a wide range of personal achievements for example in music and in sport. Commendably around 50 children and young people attend cross country training early in the morning before school, every week, all year round.

### **How well does the school improve the quality of its work?**

The headmaster continues to lead very successful improvements to take the school forward. For example, this session the school will open a new facility for the advancement of engineering science. The complementary skills of the senior management team support the headmaster well. Together with staff they have implemented important steps to take the school forward. The school has made extensive efforts to improve approaches to communication since the last visit. For example a well-organised school portal has been introduced for parents to view their child's ongoing improvement as well as attendance details and recent test results. Parents and learners have also benefited from the addition of a well-structured mobile 'app' listing the ongoing school diary of events and clubs. The Lower school 'Showcase' meetings offers a clear opportunity for parents to see their children's work and discuss improvements with the head of the Lower school. At the beginning of the academic year managers provided six Upper school parent evenings to present information about the upcoming school session. To improve communication further pupils, staff and parents can now view the headmaster's blog via the school website, in addition to the school newsletter.

The school is developing the leadership of staff through the establishment of important improvement groups. This includes the learning and teaching committee and the Lower school literacy and numeracy development groups. New parent focus groups are in place to offer them a stronger voice on school improvement. The school now has a detailed log for complaints with actions taken to resolve issues. In addition, staff can now use a suggestion box anonymously if they wish to raise concerns or offer suggestions for school improvement. The work of the Parent's Association continues to grow, providing, for example, extra funds to support learning. The recent Albyn Ball attended by nearly 200 contributors, gained the school a substantial amount of money to be used for those pupils incurring particular life challenges. Human resource policies are now shared actively by all staff working at the school. The Board of Governors is improving its systems to support and challenge the school better. Parents who met with inspectors in a focus group during the visit commented that they feel that staff are more visible in the school playground and more approachable. They feel that the school now has better structures in place to support children, parents and staff. Staff commented that they feel communication is improving through the new Wednesday after-school meetings now in place. To support staff more effectively senior managers have designed a better system of line management for all staff in the school. As a result there are clear lines of who to speak to about any suggestions for improvement or any problems or complaints. Questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and parents show improving results with regard to leadership and communication.

Senior managers and all staff should now continue the strong work in place to ensure continued improvement in all areas of its work.

### **What happens next?**

The school demonstrates a clear capacity for continued improvement. There is now evidence of improvement in the areas of the school's work required from the original visit. The headmaster and senior managers have led the school well to make the necessary improvements. The school has made extensive efforts to improve communications since the last visit. Staff, pupils and parents confirm that there is improvement in leadership systems which are benefiting all stakeholders. There continues to be a very high standard of attainment and achievement and a very broad curriculum is offered to prepare children and young people very well for life and work in the future.

As a result of the progress made by the school, we will make no further visits in connection with this letter. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the Board of Governors will inform parents about the school's progress.

Aileen Monaghan  
HM Inspector

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