

7 March 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

In April 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Coulhill Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Highland Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in February 2022. 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. 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.

All staff in the school and nursery working together with children, parents and partners, should identify and drive forward improvement priorities.

Since the original inspection, very strong progress has been made in this area. The headteacher is providing very strong leadership and is supported very well by the depute headteacher. Together, the headteacher and depute headteacher have driven key areas of improvement forward across the nursery and primary at an appropriate pace. As a result, staff, children, parents and partners are now more involved in driving forward improvements. The whole staff team are now much more involved in working together to improve the school. Approaches to self-evaluation have improved significantly since the original inspection. The school's vision, values and aims have been revised, in consultation with staff, children and parents.

In the nursery, practitioners work well together to develop further areas within the setting and embed improvements. For example, staff have worked together to improve approaches to observations and interactions of children playing and learning. This is leading to a more accurate overview of children's progress. Across the primary, working well closely as a team, senior leaders and staff have accurately identified strengths and areas for continued improvement. Staff undertake regular professional learning together, for example in learning and teaching approaches within literacy and numeracy. As a result of this, children are receiving richer quality learning experiences. Several nursery practitioners and members of primary staff have undertaken leadership responsibilities for aspects of nursery and school improvement. This includes, for example, developing the outdoor nursery environment, and improving approaches to digital learning at the primary stages. Staff support each other well and share practice across the team.

Practitioners in the nursery involve children in evaluating the setting and support them to identify what they want to develop. Children share their learning confidently and make suggestions for improvement through using the floor books or their own individual learning profiles. Children at the primary stages are confident in sharing their views, including with visitors. Through the pupil council, children participate in identifying areas of school improvement and planning in how these can be taken forward. Children in P7 are proud of their roles as house captains and other key roles in improvement. This includes their role as

Youth Champions with 'Mikey's Line'. As planned, senior leaders should continue to develop children's leadership roles to support school improvements.

Parents welcome opportunities to join their children in learning activities, including, for example, stay and play sessions in the nursery, and sharing profile sessions in the primary. Parents value the use of a messaging tool for communication between nursery, school and home. The family link worker provides a very helpful role in supporting children and families in a sensitive and nurturing manner. As planned, senior leaders should continue to develop approaches to encouraging parents to be more fully involved in supporting school improvements, including through the Parent Council. Professional partners support aspects of children's learning well and report very positive relationships with all in the school.

Improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment by developing a shared understanding of what high quality practice looks like.

Since the original inspection, strong progress has been made in this area. The quality of learning, teaching and assessment has improved. Across the nursery and primary, practitioners and staff have continued to develop their knowledge and skills, resulting in positive learning experiences for children.

In the nursery, practitioners have created an inviting learning environment which allows children to explore and develop their curiosity and inquiry. Practitioners interact with children in a positive and caring manner, which supports children's confidence and self-esteem. Practitioners use skilled questioning increasingly to support and extend children's learning. Most children are engaged well in their learning across the indoor and outdoor environment. Across the primary stages, staff work well together to identify and agree key features of high-quality learning and teaching experiences. As a result of this focus, there are more consistent approaches to learning and teaching. Staff should continue to embed the valuable work in high-quality learning and teaching across all stages. Children are now more able to discuss their strengths and areas for development, as teachers offer opportunities to reflect on their learning. Staff should continue to help children set and review their own learning targets. Children are more motivated and engaged in learning as a result of their views being sought more regularly. Staff encourage children to make choices about the level of difficulty they wish to tackle in a learning task. Most children are confident that their work challenges them to do their best. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to setting work at the appropriate level of difficulty for all children.

Senior leaders and staff continue to develop approaches to assessing children's understanding and progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. As a result of this, staff are using key assessments and approaches which provide information to support and identify children's next steps in learning. As planned, staff should continue to develop a shared understanding of quality assessment and agree consistent approaches.

Strengthen how staff in the school and nursery meet children's needs. In doing this develop staff understanding of wellbeing, equality and inclusion.

Since the original inspection, strong progress has been made in how staff across the school and nursery meet children's needs. Across the nursery and primary stages, practitioners and staff provide an inclusive ethos and work well together to support the individual needs of all

children. In the nursery, key workers know their individual children very well and provide sensitive and caring support for individuals. In the primary, there are positive relationships and a much calmer and more respectful ethos throughout. Staff have a better understanding of children's needs and approaches are now more appropriate. As a result of staff's positive relationships and approaches, children's needs are now being better met.

Across the nursery and primary stages, children are making positive progress towards developing their understanding of wellbeing. Children use the wellbeing indicators regularly to reflect on their personal wellbeing. This is helping them to understand factors that impact on their emotional and physical health and wellbeing. In the nursery, children know what they need to do to keep themselves safe and healthy, for example, in preparing for snack, or playing and learning in the snow. Across the primary, children value the time staff take to talk to them and ask them how they are feeling. They speak articulately about how adults in school and school partners, help support their emotional wellbeing. Senior leaders should continue to explore approaches to reinforcing aspects of wellbeing collectively with children.

Together, the staff team have undertaken professional learning which has had a positive impact on their practice in meeting individual children's learning needs. Practitioners and staff use a range of strategies skilfully to support children in understanding and regulating their emotions, including emotional check-ins. Through this, almost all children cope well with challenges and continue to develop positive relationships with each other. Most children speak knowledgeably about what to do to keep themselves safe. They trust adults in school and are confident the adults keep them safe. Older children are aware of how to keep themselves safe online. Children are developing an awareness of conflict, and most can identify resolutions and solutions. Senior leaders should continue with planned staff development to support children's ability to resolve difficult situations when they arise. Staff should continue to strengthen approaches to wellbeing to ensure that all children feel respected, responsible and included. Senior leaders have developed a comprehensive programme to monitor the progress of children who require additional support with their learning. Targets in child's plans are now more focused with clear, expected outcomes. Children, parents and partners are more involved in monitoring progress and planning next steps. Strong, collaborative working relationships with agencies outwith school have a positive impact on children.

Senior leaders monitor attendance rigorously and work closely with families and partners to improve children's attendance at school. As identified, senior leaders should continue to identify approaches to improve attendance, to ensure children have the best possible opportunities to learn and achieve. Senior leaders acknowledge that work to promote children's learning about equality and inclusion is at an early stage. As planned, the staff team should continue to explore how they can engage children in relevant planned learning about equality and diversity.

Raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. To do this, staff need to develop a clearer understanding of standards, expectations and progression in learning.

Since the original inspection, satisfactory progress has been made in this area. Attainment is improving across the school. Staff now have a clearer understanding of standards, expectations and progression in learning. Children are progressing well in all aspects in the nursery. The majority of children across the primary stages are on track to achieve

appropriate Curriculum for Excellence levels in reading, writing and numeracy, with most children on track to achieve appropriate levels in listening and talking. Senior leaders have an understanding that it will take time to embed significant improvements in attainment over time.

In the nursery, practitioners have improved their approaches to how children's progress is observed and recorded, including through the use of profiles and floor books. Practitioners monitor and track children's progress well. Transition across the early level from nursery to P1 has been revised. Practitioners and P1 staff now work very well together to provide experiences for children in the nursery and main school building. All of this activity supports progression in learning and children's confidence in moving on into P1. Staff in the primary school are increasingly confident using national benchmarks and making professional judgements. Approaches to reviewing learning have improved through peer observations and collaborating with colleagues in other schools. Staff undertake ongoing moderation activities in writing, with colleagues across the Alness Associated Schools Group. This supports expectations of consistency in literacy standards. Senior leaders track an overview of attainment and children's progress effectively. Senior leaders and staff have regular and helpful planning and attainment meetings, where children's progress and learner journeys are tracked. Through discussions, staff identify support interventions required and plan next steps in children's learning. Senior leaders and staff have reviewed and revised assessments, which are now more purposeful. Staff are using data from assessments to inform targeted interventions, including in reading and numeracy. As a result of these interventions and support, children's attainment is improving.

Across the nursery and primary, children are now accessing greater opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. Children's achievements are now celebrated and shared, for example through regular assemblies and school displays. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to track and monitor children's achievements and link them to skills they are developing. Senior leaders and staff recognise that improving children's attainment remains an area of high priority. There are clear plans and well-considered actions in place to support this.

What happens next?

The school has made strong progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The Highland Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Sally Stewart
HM Inspector