

24 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In December 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Port Erroll Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in January 2019. 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. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and their report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Increase the pace of developing the curriculum to ensure appropriate progression and depth in learning.

With the support of the local authority, there is now an increased emphasis on the planning of learning. Since August 2019, school staff have been more actively engaged in working together to develop shared approaches to improve the consistency of children's learning.

Across the school and the nursery, staff are working to develop the curriculum to improve experiences for children. The recently launched curriculum rationale sets the context for learning and takes account of the school's refreshed vision, values and aims. The curriculum being planned reflects the principles and entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and acknowledges the geographical context of the school community. As the curriculum is being developed, the school should make clear reference to the skills for learning, life and work and the wider issues shaping the world to help emphasise the breadth and relevance of learning.

Within the nursery, approaches to delivering the curriculum continue to develop positively. There is an increasing use of floorbooks and wall displays with children to identify what they already know and what they want to learn about. Practitioners should continue to build on the existing skills, knowledge and understanding that children already have and increase opportunities for children to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. Children now need to be encouraged to have a greater awareness of their next steps in learning and the progress they are making.

Staff have enhanced transitions from nursery into P1 through more planned and structured activities throughout the summer term. This has helped to promote continuity in children's learning. Staff should continue to build on positive improvements such as the development of play based approaches in P1.

Across the primary stages, there is a greater emphasis now being placed on planned collegiate working. Staff are now working together to plan learning pathways across stages. While still at the early stages, this should help to link prior learning and improve children's progress. Supported through moderation activities, teachers express greater confidence in applying the National Benchmarks in assessing children's progress. In moving forward, a sharper focus on the skills children have developed and a greater account of prior learning should provide more appropriate challenge for some children. The headteacher now needs to introduce a curriculum overview of learning across all stages and this should be taken forward as a priority. This overview will form the basis for a more detailed analysis of the delivery of the principles and entitlements of CfE.

It is important now to build on the work being undertaken by staff to improve further the approaches to learning and teaching. Staff now need to place a greater emphasis on enquiry based open ended activities to bring additional breadth and depth to children's experiences. This should also help to promote the higher order skills of independent learning. In planning the curriculum, children would benefit from a greater emphasis on learning set in real life contexts as a means of reinforcing the transferrable nature and application of skills and knowledge.

Better meet the needs of individual learners and work in collaboration with children, parents and partners to identify next steps in learning.

Staff are now developing a better understanding of how approaches to learning and teaching will equip children to become more successful as learners. This is evident in the changes being introduced to classroom practice.

In the nursery, relationships between practitioners and children are consistently positive. This supports children to feel safe, secure and ready to learn. Children demonstrate respect for each other and a growing sense of responsibility towards resources and their environment. Practitioners are aware of children who may have barriers to their learning. Where appropriate, additional planning is put in place, including with partner agencies. Partnership working with external agencies to support children in the nursery has improved. The headteacher and practitioners should continue to review how they are meeting all learning needs and ensuring equity for all children.

At the primary stages, almost all children indicate that they enjoy school. They feel that their opinions and views are valued and that the school is helping them to grow in confidence. Recently, staff have undertaken professional learning on improving teaching methodologies. This is having a positive impact on children's learning. In most lessons, teachers work well with children in individual and small group situations to support them in their learning. Children are starting to engage in discussions that are helping them to take more ownership of learning. Improvements to sharing the purpose of an activity, is helping to support children in making judgements on their learning. To better meet the needs of individual learners, staff need to ensure more appropriate challenge for children by planning learning that builds on their strengths and challenges their thinking.

The school's approaches to track and monitor children's progress in literacy and numeracy over time have been strengthened in the last year. Children in the nursery and the primary are now included in the revised whole school approach to tracking progress. The headteacher has introduced an electronic system that provides an overview of assessment data and teacher professional judgements. Across the school and nursery, a more consistent approach to tracking children's progress is now in place. This will support the headteacher and staff in identifying children's needs. Along with this, nursery practitioners track individual progress in literacy and numeracy using developmental overviews. Together, the revised tracking systems and nursery learning profiles have the potential to evidence the progress children make in their learning over time. The school now needs to extend more targeted interventions for individual children to ensure they make appropriate progress in their learning. Across the primary stages, termly meetings are held between the headteacher and class teachers. These have led to more focused planning of learning and evaluation of any interventions to support and challenge children in their learning. The headteacher recognises that more time is needed for these systems to be embedded and for the impact to be assessed.

Some action has been taken to strengthen children's participation in the life of the school. Members of the pupil council have recently embarked on a programme of 'Learning Walks' which aims to gather information on the quality of learning experiences. Children need to be clearer on the purpose of the activities of pupil groups in relation to school and community improvement. It is too early to measure the impact of children's involvement in decision making on learning.

There is a need for improved communication with parents regarding children's learning, where progress and achievements can be shared more regularly. This will help parents know their children better as learners and enable them to support their child's learning at home.

Develop robust systems of self-evaluation that lead to well-paced change, consistently high-quality learners' experiences and improved outcomes for learners.

With the support of the local authority, some early progress is now being made in developing approaches to school improvement. The headteacher and staff now appreciate better the actions which require to be taken to improve outcomes for children, particularly at the primary stages. The school's approach to gathering information on children's progress and meeting their needs is improving.

Practitioners in the nursery continue to reflect on and develop their practice to improve experiences for children. The use of robust self-evaluation remains an important area for development. This is required to provide a reliable and coherent overview of what is working well and what still needs to improve. Practitioners would benefit from increased leadership and direction from both the headteacher and the local authority in taking forward developments. Practitioners are continuing to develop ways to help engage children in discussing their progress. There is now potential for a greater use to be made of data to inform the planning of children's

learning. This will also provide valuable information to form the basis of rigorous discussions about children's progress.

Across the primary stages, staff feel that they are now more actively involved in the school's self-evaluation. This is now being supported through a planned programme where staff are coming together to discuss ways to improve the quality of children's experiences. Staff welcome these opportunities. The recent introduction of a programme of learning observations by the headteacher should help to develop a clearer understanding of the progress being made.

As the school's approaches to tracking, monitoring and evaluating children's progress become more established, the information gathered should help teachers identify any attainment gaps in children's learning and put in place strategies to support children's development. Having a more reliable picture of children's strengths and prior learning should contribute to a better understanding of children's needs. Where appropriate, this information should help staff increase the challenge within learning for higher attaining children and ensure that the pace matches the needs of individual children as they move through different stages.

The school benefits from a highly supportive Parent Council. In taking forward developments, there is considerable scope to increase the role of the Parent Council in shaping school improvement. The Parent Council feel that they could be involved more in discussing issues affecting the school. It will be important as the school moves forward to recognise the parent body as a valuable partner supporting the school's improvement journey.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within 12 months of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeenshire Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Charles Rooney
HM Inspector