

21 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Uryside Primary School and Nursery Class we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with children, parents, staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Uryside Primary School and Nursery Class. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher, senior leadership team and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

The headteacher and staff team have supported their school community very well through COVID-19. During the first lockdown, staff set up a learning hub and welcomed children and young people from other local schools. They worked tirelessly to ensure all children and young people felt safe and cared for during this very challenging time. During the second period of lockdown, staff provided a well-attended learning hub for their own pupils. They also continued to provide a successful remote learning programme to support children at home.

The pandemic is impacting on the school community in many different ways. Staff have a very good understanding of how individual children and families are being affected and are taking positive steps to support them. Staff have offered well-considered, sensitive support to children and their families who were facing particular challenges during periods of remote learning. This included distributing food parcels and undertaking 'wellbeing check-in' door-step visits. Parents shared with us how much they appreciated the kindness and accessibility of staff during this time. Throughout periods of remote learning, staff organised daily 'check-ins' in all classes to help identify and support any child who was struggling with the impact of the pandemic. Due to the success of the remote daily 'check ins', staff have continued to use this approach to support children as they returned to face-to-face learning.

During periods of remote learning, staff organised a number of positive, virtual school community events, for example, a whole-school sports day. These events helped to support wellbeing and strengthen connections across the school community. Staff are continuing to offer whole-school events, such as the recent, successful 'reading for enjoyment month'. Children told us that they appreciated the different ways they were encouraged to enjoy and share books with others. Parents also reported that this event has had a very positive impact on children's attitudes to reading.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Since the original inspection, there have been significant changes to the staff teams in both the nursery class and primary school. In the nursery class, a new senior practitioner, two lead practitioners and 10 new practitioners have been appointed. In addition, over 12 new members of staff have joined the primary staff team.

Since the original inspection, the school has made significant improvements in the nursery class. The newly appointed early years senior practitioner (EYSP) has fostered very strong teamwork. In their relatively short time together, practitioners have formed a cohesive, effective and enthusiastic team who have significant potential for continued development. The EYSP, alongside senior leaders from the school and visiting principal teacher, has created a culture where everyone identifies, contributes and leads on key improvements. Practitioners have made valuable progress in developing their skills in observing children's learning. This is helping them to identify appropriate next steps in learning for individual children. Senior leaders carefully monitor all observations made and support practitioners to ensure these are consistently effective. Practitioners have improved significantly their approaches to planning children's learning. They now plan experiences based on children's learning needs and interests. Practitioners are taking forward meaningful and noteworthy change to the learning environment, both indoors and outdoors. Children now have opportunities to explore, experiment and be creative in their own time and space. As part of the improved environment, practitioners are now ready to develop ways to support children to lead their own learning. In doing so, children should be encouraged to develop a better understanding of their individual strengths and what they need to learn next.

Senior leaders have taken positive steps to continue to develop consistency in learning, teaching and assessment across primary classes. Due to ongoing challenges as a result of the pandemic, this remains an ongoing priority for improvement. Staff are making a positive start in the use of planning frameworks for literacy and numeracy which are helping to provide greater consistency across classes. They are also benefitting from more opportunities to learn from each other. This has been particularly successful as staff take forward new approaches to outdoor learning and teaching writing.

At the primary stages, children are relishing the opportunities they now have to lead their own learning. They told us how much they are enjoying being more independent in their learning and describe well how this is promoted in class. Children are able to decide how they would like to learn, for example, by making use of different digital tools. As planned, senior leaders should continue to support staff to refine and develop further ways for children to learn in rich and rewarding contexts.

Across the school, children are becoming clearer about their own strengths and next steps in learning. They shared with us how much they are enjoying new ways to record the new skills they are learning in mathematics. They appreciate how this approach helps them to learn from their mistakes.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff are making positive progress addressing the recommendations from the original inspection. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. Aberdeenshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector