

21 January 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Cunningsburgh Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement, which we agreed with the school and Shetlands Islands Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again with a particular focus on the nursery class. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the headteacher and practitioners in the nursery class. We heard from the headteacher and others 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.

**Strengthen the use of self-evaluation in the school and in particular in the nursery class, to monitor more closely the impact of the school's work on outcomes for children. This will support the school in planning for future improvements in a more strategic and focused way and accelerate the pace of change.**

Since the initial inspection, senior leaders and staff have taken forward a programme of substantial development, especially in the nursery class. Practitioners in the nursery class, along with the headteacher, have brought about significant change. This includes approaches used to support children to learn and the quality of the learning environment. Other important changes since the initial inspection include building works and an increase to the number of hours children can attend nursery. Practitioners continually reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve to support children's learning. Throughout their improvement journey, practitioners have had a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and realising the shared vision for Cunningsburgh Early Years. Part of this vision is extending play-based learning into P1 and beyond. School staff have made a positive start to developing this as part of the current school improvement plan.

As part of the valued support from the local authority, the headteacher and practitioners have benefitted from a range of high-quality professional learning. Practitioners have developed a passion and strong commitment to their continued professional learning. This has played a key role in supporting their ongoing improvement journey. The resulting deeper, professional knowledge and confidence has empowered practitioners to lead change and significantly improve what they provide for children in the nursery class. Approaches to delivering early learning and childcare at Cunningsburgh Primary School have been revitalised and now reflect current thinking and good practice. The school has identified it will be important that a consistent understanding is developed within the newly formed team. There has been recognition of the success of the nursery class within the local authority. Practitioners have shared their practice with others through workshops at local authority events. Aspects of their practice, including their response to the initial inspection, and the development of the learning environment, are worthy of sharing more widely.

Practitioners and staff continue to develop self-evaluation processes, based on reflective practice, across the nursery and school. In the nursery, the headteacher and practitioners now have regular meetings, with a sharper focus on improvement priorities, self-evaluation

and tracking children's progress in literacy and numeracy. In the school, staff have increased opportunities for pupil participation. The pupil council has developed their own improvement plan, delivered alongside the school improvement plan. The school should now identify future areas for development from robust evidence as the use of self-evaluation continues to develop. Using their significantly developed knowledge and understanding, practitioners are now ready to make increased use of the national guidance, 'How good is our early learning and childcare?' This will allow them to evaluate their refreshed practice against national standards.

**Staff should continue working towards achieving consistency of high expectations across the school and nursery. This will support children to experience the challenge they require.**

In the nursery class, practitioners have significantly increased their expectations of children. Children are now encouraged by practitioners to develop independence. Practitioners have undertaken a robust audit of resources, to ensure they are appropriate for the new approaches to learning. They have made careful use of funds to refocus on developing children's curiosity and creativity. As a result, the nursery is now a more stimulating environment, with innovative resources and furniture pieces that are interesting and provide challenge to children. Practitioners have creatively sourced these from across the islands and beyond, many reflecting the history and heritage of the Shetland Islands. The 'outdoor room' facilitates new, challenging block play and real-life experiences, such as woodwork. The creation of this space allows for 'outdoor' play in even the most challenging Shetland weather. The inviting and stimulating art and craft space allows children opportunities to create, experiment, explore and investigate, following their own interests. The quiet 'living' room provides an attractive and homely space for children to reflect and chat. Here they can explore books, digital technologies and challenge their thinking with games and puzzles. This area is particularly effective in reassuring and settling children newer to the nursery.

Practitioners' improved approaches to their observations of children at play show numerous examples of increased challenge in learning. This is as a result of practitioners' new, child-centred approach and the refreshed environment. Children assess risk in their own play, using problem-solving skills. They challenge themselves throughout their play, with practitioners sensitively supporting, to test and extend their thinking. Levels of engagement and commitment to tasks by children have increased considerably. They are motivated and taking increasing ownership of their own learning.

**Staff should continue to develop learning pathways in literacy and numeracy to ensure that children make the best possible progress. Continue to develop the way in which the school tracks children's progress in literacy and numeracy.**

Practitioners and staff have put in place learning pathways for literacy and numeracy across the nursery and school. These are supporting learning and teaching across the school, including assessment by staff of the progress children make in their learning. Practitioners in the nursery class use a personalised approach to learning for each child. Changes made to the environment promote the development of children's early literacy and numeracy skills very well. Practitioners' observations demonstrate that all children are progressing at their

own developmental stage and are making appropriate progress. At the primary stages, staff have developed appropriate approaches to track the progress children make in literacy and numeracy. In the nursery, practitioners use simple trackers to record children's progress, with systems to track literacy developed more fully than numeracy. Practitioners have taken a measured approach to implementing this approach to ensure a well-developed and shared understanding across the team. They are keen to use information about children's progress to identify individuals and small groups of children who may benefit from additional support and challenge in their learning. A next step is for practitioners to ensure that the assessment information they gather is a well-balanced mix of observations of children at play alongside their professional judgements. They can also use assessment information to measure and evaluate the difference the improvements brought about make to children's progress in their learning.

### What happens next?

The school has made very good 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. Shetlands Islands Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools. During the visit, we identified aspects of practice worthy of sharing more widely which we would like to explore further. We will work with the school and Shetland Islands Council to record the interesting practice and share it more widely.

Barbara Daly  
HM Inspector