

18 October 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

California Primary School and Nursery Class Falkirk Council

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including the teaching of French and opportunities for creativity in learning. As a result we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the nursery class and primary stages, children are happy and proud of their school. In the nursery class, children are forming friendships and are kind and considerate towards each other. The majority of children enjoy their experience and are motivated in their play, especially during outside learning. For example, children concentrate for long periods of time while painting the shed and climbing frame with water and brushes. Children would now benefit from greater opportunities to be more independent and make more choices in their play. Staff recognise the need to make better and more regular use of the wider community to extend children's learning experiences. Across the primary stages, almost all children are very well behaved and polite. They show respect to staff, each other and visitors. Overall, the majority of children work well together in groups and pairs to complete learning activities. Children now need greater opportunities to be more actively involved in, and take responsibility for their own learning so they better understand the progress they are making. We have asked staff to improve the quality of feedback they provide to help children know what they need to do to improve their learning. The majority of children undertake leadership roles in school, for example, through the eco committee, Pupil Council and in their roles as buddies and house captains. Children are not yet able to talk about the skills they are learning through these roles. We have asked staff to discuss this more with children. Children's achievements are recognised in classes and at school assemblies.

We found that children across the school and nursery class are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. In the nursery class, children listen well at large group activities. The majority of children can recognise letters in their name and a few can read simple words. Children are enthusiastic about

their early writing skills and have, for example, helped staff make labels for other play areas. Children now need greater opportunities to develop their early literacy skills across all aspects of their play, including outdoors. In numeracy, children are beginning to recognise numbers in their environment and engage well with activities using numbers and symbols in their play. Children are developing their understanding of mathematics through activities such as water play. Children would now benefit from further opportunities to problem solve and use their numeracy skills in real life situations. Overall, across the primary stages children's progress is satisfactory. Attainment is strong in the early years but progress in learning is not sustained as children move through the school. Children can write for a variety of purposes and the majority are able to express their feelings and ideas. The majority of children in the upper stages recognise how reading a variety of texts has helped them improve their own writing style. Across the school, children are able to discuss a variety of texts and indicate their preferences for particular types of books. They now need to better develop reading, writing, listening and talking skills across all aspects of their learning. Within mathematics and numeracy, children are motivated to improve their recall of multiplication facts through their 'beat it' challenges. As a result of this work, children's achievement in this area is improving. Children now need greater opportunities to engage in more challenging problem solving activities which enable them to explain their thinking to their peers. Across the primary stages children are developing well their learning in French. They are gaining confidence in their use of French vocabulary and using simple phrases in conversation. Children across the nursery and school are developing their understanding of how to make healthy choices. They now need much greater opportunities to use digital technologies to enhance their learning.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Across the nursery and primary stages, staff know the children and their families well. In the nursery, staff have developed nurturing relationships. Parents have daily opportunities to speak to staff and informative newsletters provide parents with suggestions of how they can support their child's learning at home. We have asked staff to provide more challenging activities to extend children's learning both indoor and outdoors. At the primary stages, teachers are well attuned to the emotional and social needs of children. The majority of lessons take account of individual children's learning needs. Overall, tasks and activities are appropriate to meet the needs of the majority of children. We have asked the school to now ensure learning is at a suitable level of difficulty to meet the needs of all children. Staff who work with children who require additional help in their learning work together to support children well. Teachers liaise well with partnership agencies. Individualised plans are in place for children who need them and are reviewed with parents. We have asked the school to record how well children are achieving the targets in these plans more regularly.

Staff are growing in confidence in using Curriculum for Excellence to plan for children's learning. As a result, in all classes, children experience learning across all subject areas. Children particularly enjoy their learning in science, mathematics and French. Overall however, there are important weaknesses in the curriculum. Staff recognise that they need to develop their programmes and courses for all areas of the curriculum. In doing this, we have asked staff to ensure they build on children's knowledge and skills as they move through the school. Staff recognise the need to improve approaches to assessment and recording children's progress across all

aspects of the curriculum. We have asked the school to involve parents, children and partners more closely in the development of the curriculum to ensure everyone has a shared understanding of what the school is striving to achieve. This work should include a clear focus on raising attainment. Children at P7 are motivated through links with Braes High school and have developed confidence about their move to secondary school through their residential experience planned with other local primary children. The school should now develop better opportunities for staff across the nursery and early stages of primary to work together to ensure children are building on their learning in the nursery as they move onto P1.

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

The headteacher is committed to improving the work of the school and nursery. Supported by the depute headteacher, they have worked together to strengthen how effective the school is at knowing what they need to do to improve. As a result of the shared headship arrangements, teachers now have greater opportunities to work with colleagues across both schools. Teachers speak positively about how this is helping them reflect on and improve their teaching. The school has begun to consider how the views of parents and children can be used to improve their work. For example, the school has recently worked with parents to improve approaches to homework. We have asked the school to seek more opportunities for parents, children and school partners to become involved in evaluating the work of the school on a more regular basis. Overall, whilst the school has taken forward some improvements in self-evaluation, there are important weaknesses which still need to be addressed. The headteacher and depute headteacher have introduced a range of ways to judge the quality of the school's performance. However, these approaches are not yet leading to improvements in the curriculum or raising attainment further. The school needs to ensure that they evaluate more robustly how well their work is leading to improvements in children's learning. The school does not yet have a system in place to monitor children's progress and achievement. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure teachers have a clearer understanding of how well children are improving in their learning.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Polite, well-behaved children who are caring towards each other.
- Staff who work well together and want the best for their children.
- Almost all parents are happy with the school and the ways in which staff support their children.

We discussed with staff and Falkirk Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Develop approaches to assessing and tracking children's progress to raise attainment and achievement.
- Improve the curriculum and increase the pace of implementation of national guidance.
- Strengthen approaches to self-evaluation to ensure they result in improvements in children's learning.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Our Area Lead Officer will work with Falkirk Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further inspection within twelve months of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

Louise Turnbull
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/CaliforniaPrimarySchoolFalkirk.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.