

14 January 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on South Lodge 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. 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting Choose an item. learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

**Improve learning, teaching and assessment to ensure the needs of all children are met and that they are fully engaged in their learning.**

South Lodge Primary School and Nursery Class continues to be a warm and friendly environment, where the wellbeing of children and families is central to the day-to-day work of all. Since the last inspection, the headteacher and promoted staff have taken a well-judged approach to improving learning, teaching and assessment across the primary and nursery classes. There is clear evidence of the positive impact their work is having on children's experiences. Across the primary stages, children talk positively about the changes they recognise in their classroom experiences and across the life of the school. They appreciate having more opportunities to engage in active learning approaches, including learning outdoors. Parents that met with inspectors, and almost all those responding in the pre-inspection questionnaire, are positive about the new learning and teaching approaches. They feel that their children increasingly find learning fun, active and more engaging. This results in children enjoying their school experiences more and being motivated to make better progress in their learning. Parents of children who have additional needs are very positive about the support they receive from teachers, support staff and school leaders. They feel that the headteacher, depute headteacher and staff 'go the extra mile' to ensure all children and families are supported in an inclusive, positive and non-judgemental way.

In the nursery, practitioners sensitively interact with children, capturing their interests as they support and extend children's learning. They are improving their skills in questioning to encourage children to be fully engaged, creative and inquisitive as they play. Practitioners have made great strides in developing the outdoor environment to provide varied and rich experiences for children.

Teachers, practitioners, children and parents have explored together what 'good' learning and teaching looks like. As a result, there is now a better understanding across the staff team of expected standards and features of good practice. Teachers have worked hard to ensure lessons are carefully planned to better meet the needs of all children. They now have higher expectations of what children can achieve. Teachers and practitioners are increasingly making better use of the assessment data they gather, to plan for children's next steps in learning. As planned, staff should continue to share effective practice in learning and teaching, including visiting other schools and early learning and childcare settings.

**There is a need to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. We have asked staff to evaluate how well the range of initiatives currently in place to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy are leading to improvement.**

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and depute headteacher have taken a measured and effective approach to raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. They have appreciated the strong support of officers from The Highland Council, who have helped staff to implement new programmes for teaching spelling, reading, writing and numeracy. Support assistants have received training in order for them to provide high-quality, targeted assistance for children who face barriers to their learning. The school's evaluations of these new initiatives show that staff and children are very positive about the changes taking place and that there is a brisker pace of learning in literacy and numeracy lessons. There are early signs that children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is improving as a result. As planned, teachers should continue to develop and embed the new programmes and approaches to literacy and numeracy, ensuring that all children can make the best possible progress.

In the nursery, practitioners have a strong focus on helping children to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. Children continue to gain confidence in talking and listening to adults and their friends. Practitioners work with speech and language therapists when children need additional support. Practitioners now provide a wider range of activities across the learning environment to encourage children's interests, whilst developing their early literacy and numeracy skills. This enhanced focus on literacy and numeracy, together with practitioners' careful tracking of each child's progress, is helping to improve children's attainment.

**Staff at the primary stages and in the nursery should improve how they track the progress children are making and use this information to inform plans for children's next steps in learning.**

The headteacher and depute headteacher have demonstrated clear and effective leadership in introducing better approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress. Teachers and practitioners have adopted new methods to track the progress of individuals and groups of children. Staff have worked well together to ensure they have a shared understanding of national standards and expectations. At the primary stages, teachers meet regularly with the headteacher and depute headteacher to discuss the progress children are making and to identify and address any barriers to successful learning. Senior leaders and staff place great value in collaborating and sharing practice with other local schools. As a result, staff are implementing new approaches to assessing children's progress, which is making a difference for children. Staff report they are more confident in their professional judgements and are embracing fully the new pedagogical approaches introduced. Taken together, these steps are helping teachers to have a clear focus on ensuring all children make better progress in their learning.

Teachers and practitioners in the nursery class have made significant progress in developing a rigorous system to track younger children's progress. Tracking for individual children helps practitioners to identify where children are meeting their developmental milestones and where they may require more support. Staff use the data they gather to provide very helpful evidence of the progress children are making in their learning. Practitioners use this detailed information to identify key targets for individual children. They

work closely then with children to help them to achieve these targets and carefully record their successes in learning journey folders.

The headteacher and depute headteacher have developed a helpful overview of whole school and class-by-class attainment, from nursery to P7. This information is shared regularly with all staff to inform professional discussions and next steps for school improvement. Through the development of this system, the headteacher now tracks carefully the progress of individuals and cohorts of children, for example those facing challenges or barriers in their learning, including those facing socio-economic disadvantage. As the school's tracking of data progresses, teachers and practitioners should continue to monitor such cohorts of children, to ensure any attainment gap is clearly identified and appropriate interventions can be applied.

### **Further develop the curriculum and how learning is planned to ensure an appropriate pace of learning for all children against national standards.**

Over the last year, staff have worked with children and parents to develop a curriculum rationale that is unique to the context of South Lodge Primary School and Nursery Class, aligned to its bespoke vision and values. Improved programmes and pathways are now in place for most curriculum areas, particularly for literacy and numeracy. These pathways are helping teachers and practitioners to more carefully plan children's learning, building on their skills and knowledge as they move through the stages of the nursery and school. The headteacher has appropriate plans in place to continue to develop and refresh other areas of the curriculum over time. Staff should continue to develop a shared understanding of effective interdisciplinary learning and how this can provide opportunities for depth and challenge in children's learning.

Since the last inspection, staff have adopted a greater focus on developing children's skills for learning, life and work. The school community has identified its own set of 'super skills' which children are supported well to develop. These include collaboration, teamwork and organisational skills. Children are becoming better at recognising when they are applying these skills in their learning and day-to-day school life. By P7, they talk with increasing awareness of how these attributes, alongside literacy and numeracy skills, will help them in their future lives and the world of work.

Teachers are taking the lead in developing the curriculum. For example, a few teachers have worked hard to plan a series of 'enrichment days'. These sessions offer opportunities for children and parents together to engage in exciting activities, learn new skills and share their talents and interests. Examples of the sessions on offer include baking, coding, manga artwork, hair and beauty and crocheting. Children talk enthusiastically about the skills they are developing through these worthwhile activities and record their achievements in their 'learning journey' folders. The enrichment days are very well received by the whole school community and engage children particularly well in their learning.

### What happens next?

The school has made 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. The Highland Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Lesley A Johnstone  
HM Inspector