

30 April 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In June 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Rowantree Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Dundee City Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in February 2018. 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 children's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Provide strong and sustained leadership to take forward significant improvements across the school to help children make the best possible progress.

The headteacher and the senior leadership team in the primary and nursery class provide strong sensitive leadership. Together with staff they are passionate about improving children's experiences and bringing about effective and lasting change. The positive changes they have made to improve the work of the school have been achieved through a relentless focus on identifying the needs of the children and their families. A range of universal and targeted approaches have been introduced in a concerted effort to secure the very best outcomes for all of the children at Rowantree Primary School. Some of these approaches have been very successful while others are beginning to show positive impact.

We found children to be proud of their school. They show an increasing confidence and belief in themselves as capable learners. The children we met with told us they love the positive changes to their school. They are part of leading the changes and they can influence what happens in their school.

We have asked the senior leadership team to ensure that they evaluate regularly the impact of the additional teaching and support staff employed in the school. It is important that the school can evidence how additional staff are helping to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. We have asked the school to increase the pace of activities related to raising children's attainment and to seek support as required from Dundee City Council to ensure children make the best possible progress.

Ensure consistently high quality learning experiences, including involving children in planning and reflecting on their own learning in order to improve attainment.

The refreshed vision, aims and values which are central features of Rowantree Primary School and Nursery Class are increasingly being embedded in the work of the school. In particular, the values are having a positive impact on the quality of children's learning experiences.

In the nursery class, children have increased opportunities to follow their interests in a considerably improved learning environment. Children regularly make choices about where and what they want to play with. Practitioners involve children in planning some aspects of their learning. Floorbooks are used as a planning tool and to capture children's interests. Practitioners then discuss how best to support and provide children with access to new experiences or to build on their existing knowledge.

Across the primary classes, children are now involved in planning their learning. Children speak positively about the opportunities they have to contribute to the planning process. They highlight that because their views are taken into account their learning is now more interesting. There are several positive features of learning and teaching. In almost all lessons we observed, teachers use questioning effectively to check for children's understanding. In the best examples, teachers ask questions which probe children's thinking, encourage fuller responses and require children to justify their answers. There is a need to share best practice to ensure children benefit from consistently high quality learning experiences. We have asked teachers to increase their expectations by accelerating the pace of learning for children. This will help raise attainment and provide further challenge and help more children achieve their full potential.

The school now has attainment information for all children across the school. The headteacher acknowledges that this information on children's attainment is not yet accurate enough. Current predications show that the majority of children are expected to achieve the appropriate national level at P1 but less than half at P4 and P7. As staff become more confident in the use of attainment information they should ensure that they also track attainment over time for individuals and groups of children. This will help staff develop an understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve. This includes tracking the attainment of different groups of children including those who require additional support.

Improve the school's approaches to assessment, tracking and monitoring to ensure there are clear processes in place which are used by staff to track, review and enhance children's progress in learning.

With the support of senior leaders, staff now use a variety of assessment approaches, to inform their judgements about children's progress in learning. Staff work with other schools to agree the expectations of standards to achieve a level. They are becoming increasingly familiar with the national benchmarks for literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Staff should continue to develop their understanding of how assessment informs learning and to work on developing a common approach to assessment across the school.

Considerably improve arrangements for identifying and meeting children's learning needs.

Children benefit from learning environments which are calm and purposeful and promote the school's values of feeling safe, respect and fostering of positive relationships. Across the school, nurturing approaches are being used well to ensure relationships are positive across the school. Children told inspectors that they feel safe and other children behave well in the classrooms and playground.

Teachers benefit from regular meetings with specialist staff to discuss how to support children who have barriers to learning. They are more aware of children's different needs and strategies to support their learning. Staff have also developed their own understanding by participating in helpful programmes on self-regulating behaviour, nurture, play curriculum and promoting positive relationships.

The enhanced provision continues to develop its approaches to supporting learners through small group provision. All children have a well-crafted Addressing Barriers to Learning plan (ABLE) providing strategies to help them participate and engage in their learning. Staff are beginning to use close observations of learning to monitor children's progress in learning. Almost all the children attend the enhanced provision fulltime but engage with their friends at lunchtime. The school needs to continue with plans to phase the children attending the enhanced provision back into class and to target support to ensure their transition into class is successful.

Develop clear and flexible progression pathways to support the planning and delivery of all curriculum areas from nursery through to P7, building on prior learning.

The curriculum for children under three continues to be responsive to their individual needs. The curriculum for children aged three to five continues to be planned well using national guidance. The school has rightly identified the value of a play-based curriculum that offers children in nursery and P1 opportunities to take ownership of their learning and to influence what they will learn next.

The staff have created a clear statement outlining the purpose of the curriculum on offer to children. They have shared it with parents. The school has acknowledged the need, while revisiting their curriculum, to ensure all of the school community are consulted. The curriculum needs to reflect the unique context of Rowantree Primary School. Children benefit from an increase in the numbers of clubs and activities that they can participate within school time and beyond the school day. Peer educators from Craigie High School provide good support for older children making the transition to secondary school.

The school now ensures that children experience learning across all of the curriculum areas. The school is at the early stages of implementing learning programmes beyond literacy and numeracy. We have advised that the literacy and numeracy programmes now need to be embedded fully in the planning, tracking, monitoring and assessment cycle.

What happens next?

The school has continued to make progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the necessary capacity to continue to improve and as such we will make no further inspection visits to the school. We will work with Dundee City Council to support on-going improvements. We will collaborate with the authority at their next review in twelve months to share in the gathering of findings on how the school is improving. We will, along with the authority, provide a report to parents about the school's further progress in improving the curriculum and in raising attainment for children.

Dr Marion Burns
HM Inspector