

Summarised inspection findings

Ballater Primary School and Nursery Class

Aberdeenshire Council

17 September 2019

Key contextual information

Ballater Primary School and Nursery Class sits within the village of Ballater in the heart of the Cairngorms, within Aberdeenshire Council. There are 89 children in the primary with four class teachers. The nursery has 32 children. The school building is 60 years old and there is a large well-resourced playground area surrounding the building.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- The headteacher together with staff, is now beginning to build plans to raise attainment and achievement to enable all children to achieve their full potential. There is a happy and positive ethos in the school. Relationships across the staff team and amongst children are mostly positive. There is a creative and interesting environment for learning, in particular the school outdoor space. Children are very articulate and eager to talk to adults. They are confident and motivated in their interactions with adults. Children are well behaved and listen well to teachers.
- There is a variable level of engagement by children in their learning. In a few examples, where tasks are appropriately challenging, children are engaged and empowered as learners. In these examples, children lead their own learning at a pace which suits their ability. Staff should plan to share such examples of good practice in order to support greater consistency across the stages. In the majority of lessons tasks are too teacher directed and not challenging children's understanding or capacity to learn. There are missed opportunities during lessons, where teachers could extend and develop the breadth and depth of children's learning. In almost all classes, learning is directed at the whole class. A few teachers use differentiation strategies although these still maintain a ceiling on children's learning
- Most children work well together in pairs. When given the opportunity, children are creative in their responses to questions and tasks. Teacher questioning could be more challenging with the use of higher order thinking skills to extend learning. This would also support children in applying learning in new and unfamiliar situations. Children should now be supported to exercise greater choice in their learning. Children enjoy group tasks and active learning activities and would like these to be used more often in classes. Group work would benefit from being more structured to ensure all children are fully participating. Teacher planning should consistently be more focused on Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes and less on the use of resource books.
- Staff told us that sharing the purpose of lessons and the criteria for success with children, are agreed whole school approaches to a good lesson. Teachers worked together several years ago to agree aspects of a high quality lesson. This is not yet embedded in practice. Whilst there are a few positive examples, children are still not completely clear about what they are

learning in classes. They cannot yet clearly explain how they might achieve a positive outcome in a task. There is scope for teachers to review their shared understanding of what constitutes a high quality lesson and ensure this is consistently applied.

- The children across the school are skilled in aspects of leadership and the headteacher is aware that there now needs to be a stronger focus on including the pupil voice in all aspects of the school. This should include their involvement in how and what they learn. Children should have clear learning targets and should be able to track how well they are achieving these. The pupil council have been operational until now and the headteacher recognises that staff need to support a more genuinely empowered approach for children where they can be involved in leading all aspects of the school, including learning.
- The school vision and values are displayed clearly on walls. Children can talk about the values and can explain what they mean. The whole school approach to wellbeing is not yet developed and this is a key area to take forward in ensuring that school values become a lived reality. A few children in the pre-inspection questionnaires say they do not feel other children treat them with respect. The headteacher is aware that the school procedures for anti-bullying now need to be promptly updated and refreshed.
- There are well planned class charters and commendably, these link to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A few children are able to understand these and explain how they affect them. The staff should now develop the health and wellbeing curriculum as planned. This will enable children to relate their rights to everyday life. This should also equip them with skills to better manage their own behaviour and how they relate to others. The staff should include the playground in discussions with children about how their actions and behaviour affect others.
- Children receive attainment reports twice a year which reflect aspects of the curriculum, however they are not clear in defining attainment. Children and their parents are not fully aware of how well they are attaining in school. Children in classes can talk about the topics and facts that they are learning but cannot yet articulate their progression nor their skills development. The feedback from teachers to children about their learning is mainly through comments in jotters. This is not detailed enough to support children's understanding of what they need to do next. There would be merit in teachers across all stages, providing more verbal feedback during the learning process. This ongoing formative assessment would enable children to lead their own learning and work at a pace which is appropriately challenging.
- Children need greater breadth and depth in their learning and most have the potential to achieve stronger outcomes. Enabling them to apply learning in new and unfamiliar situations will support deeper learning and raised attainment for all.
- Staff have started to work together to moderate children's work. They are at the early stages of developing confidence in predicting the achievement of levels. Professional judgement of Curriculum for Excellence levels is currently based on children's jotter work and on standardised assessments. The work in jotters does not reflect the breadth of the experiences and outcomes. Professional judgement should be based on a broader range of assessment evidence and moderated with colleagues. An important area for development is for staff to devise a shared understanding of assessment including the holistic assessment of pupil work across curricular areas.
- Teachers provide written feedback to children on how to improve, for example, their writing. However, this feedback is not always sufficiently detailed to support children to make necessary improvement. Children do not have regular opportunities to set and review personal

targets to help them to achieve success, to have an understanding of their own progress and to identify next steps in learning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

- The staff are committed and work hard, a number of new processes have been introduced recently. The work on new initiatives is however, not yet impacting on outcomes for children. Most children have significant potential but there is not yet a good understanding of this amongst staff. Children's abilities are currently underestimated leading to a lack of expectation and subsequent lack of attainment.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Attainment data provided by the school is based on teachers' professional judgements. Teachers are at the early stages of using moderation and National Benchmarks to inform their judgements of achievement of a level. More work is required to ensure staff have a clear, shared understanding of standards and suitably high expectations of what children can achieve.
- Curriculum for Excellence attainment data provided by the school predicts that overall, the majority of children at early level and most children at first and second level, will achieve expected levels in literacy and numeracy by June 2019. The inspection team found that predictions for children at early and first level did not reflect national standards and expectations. Sampled evidence shows there is significant scope for improving children's progress across the school. Inspectors discussed with the headteacher that children could be making much better progress in their learning and achieving higher standards across literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in Literacy

- Children are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English language.

Listening and Talking

- Children are polite, respectful and articulate when communicating with adults and peers. They listen well to their teacher and are eager to share their experiences of the school with other adults when asked to contribute. At early and first level children respond appropriately to the instructions given and can share their thoughts and ideas. They should be encouraged to be more independent and to take ownership of their talking and listening activities. They need to learn to take turns at the appropriate time in a variety of contexts. At second level, most children communicate clearly and with expression. All children listen well but are not yet able to articulate the different skills they are developing in listening and talking. Teachers should make more use of open-ended questioning to enable children to contribute their views, ideas, information and opinions more regularly. There is a need to plan and develop a consistent and progressive approach to teaching talking and listening for all children.

Reading

- Children engage positively in reading activities and have opportunities to read for enjoyment. Across the school children have regular access to an attractive library where they can select from a wide range of books and reading materials. The focus on reading for enjoyment has increased children's motivation.
- At early level children read familiar texts aloud with varying levels of fluency and accuracy. They use their knowledge of blends and sounds to decode familiar words. A few children use picture clues to support their understanding of the text. Children would benefit from opportunities to read unfamiliar words and texts to extend their decoding skills. There is scope to plan experiences to allow children opportunities to discuss events and characters in the texts. P1 children listened well to the story being read by the parent in the school library. This could be extended to enrich children's experiences, for example through retelling familiar stories using props and puppets.
- At first level, most children are able to read different texts. They are developing their comprehension skills and talk about the main ideas, characters and plot within a text. The children identify key features of fiction and non-fiction texts. They speak about their favourite authors and preference of fiction or non-fiction books. They would like to read a wider range of text including plays which they could perform. By second level, children are able to skim and scan different texts for key ideas and information. They discuss their favourite authors and their style of writing. Some children report that although they enjoy choosing the core class reader they would like to be able to choose even more challenging texts. Most children are able to read fluently and with expression. They cannot articulate the skills they are developing in reading. Teachers need to plan and share with children the skills they are developing through reading to ensure progression.

Writing

- Progress in writing is weak. Teachers should work together to agree high expectations and the standards of presentation expected across all levels. More children would be attaining appropriate levels in writing if the pace at early and first level was increased and there was a consistent approach to teaching writing. Teachers across the school should ensure all children have planned opportunities to write regularly for meaningful purposes. Expectations of what children can achieve need to be increased. A majority of children are not yet sufficiently skilled in the formation of letters. A few are beginning to write a simple sentence independently and some still require their ideas to be scribed. There is merit in increasing opportunities for children to write at length. Younger children are beginning to attempt to start sentences in different ways to engage the reader. More opportunities to write linked to the class topic will give children opportunities to practise and apply their skills in a meaningful context.
- By the end of second level, most children have a good understanding of different genres and can use this effectively to share their thoughts and ideas. They create texts of length for a variety of audiences and a range of purposes with increasing confidence. However, the slow pace at earlier stages is impacting on the breadth and depth of learning. The majority of children working at second level are not yet making independent choices about how to structure their writing to engage the reader. For example, through using paragraphs, bullet points and headings. They are not able to use vocabulary and tone to engage and influence the reader.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Children are making insufficient progress in numeracy and mathematics. Overall attainment is weak. There is an urgent need to review approaches to planning and assessing numeracy and mathematics across the school. In doing so staff should agree on a clear progression

pathway based on Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. This will ensure children have opportunities to regularly revisit concepts and apply their learning in a range of contexts.

Number, money and measurement

- Across the school children are developing an understanding of number processes. At early level most children count objects to 20 using touch counting. They are not confident at counting on or recognising a quantity of objects in regular or irregular patterns. Most children add and subtract within 10. Most children measure the length of everyday objects using non-standard units and compare objects by length. A few estimate the length of objects accurately. At first level, most children know the 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 times tables. The majority add and subtract using money to £5 and a few to £20. The majority of children measure the length and height of objects using centimetres and metres, they cannot identify standard units of measure for weight. The majority explain what a fraction is, a few can find the fraction of an amount. At the end of second level the pace of learning increases significantly to cover gaps in children's learning. Children are more confident with concepts they have recently revised. Most are making appropriate progress in number processes. They articulate a few mental and written strategies to support their learning. Teachers across the school should plan opportunities for children to develop problem solving skills and to apply their knowledge at all levels and across the curriculum.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level the majority of children identify simple 2D shapes. They would benefit from opportunities to explore their basic properties through play. At first level, the majority of children identify simple 3D objects and describe their basic properties. They need opportunities to develop their basic understanding of angles. At second level children identify and classify a range of angles and use appropriate mathematical language. A few can work out the area of a triangle.

Information handling

- Across the school the majority of children have an understanding of graphs and how to interpret data as appropriate to their age. At first level children interpret simple graphs and charts. They use tally marks to record data. At second level most display data appropriately using a range of graphs and charts. They have recently used timetables to extract and interpret data in real and meaningful contexts. There is scope for the school to make increased use of digital technology to display information and support children to gain skills in analysis and interpretation of data.

Attainment over time

- The school is at the early stages of collecting and using data on children's attainment over time as they progress through the school. The limited data provided consists of a range of teachers' professional judgements and Scottish National Standardised Assessment data. Inspectors discussed with the headteacher the need to review approaches to assessment and the range of evidence used by teachers to make judgements about children's achievement of a level. This needs to be reviewed as a matter of urgency to ensure there is a clear picture of children's progress over time. Moving forward, staff should track the attainment of cohorts to demonstrate the progress children are making from their prior levels. A useful next step would be to revisit the moderation cycle. This will support staff in developing a more strategic approach to collecting a wide range of evidence including formative and summative assessment information.

Learners' Achievements

- Children's achievements are displayed around the school across various sports and activities such as music, art and dance. A number of activities and clubs which were previously offered are no longer available. Parents and children commented on this fact. There are new procedures to celebrate children's achievements at monthly school assemblies.
- All children P1-P7 are involved in groups contributing to the life and work of the school. The Rights Respecting Group, Digital Leaders, Pupil Council and Green Team were beginning to provide experiences for children to develop skills for learning, life and work but recently there have been limited opportunities. Children from P4-P7 take part in the school volunteering award system. They also participate in local competitions with P7 winning the Aboyne District Rotary Quiz for two successive years. The school has an active school choir and many links within the local community such as Hilton Grand Vacations, Sheltered Housing, local Churches and the Duck Festival.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know children and families well. They have a shared view of the socio-economic context of the school. The headteacher and staff identified interventions to support children's expressive language as a priority. However, inspection activity does not recognise this as a key priority. Inspectors have asked staff to use data to identify potential barriers to children's learning and any attainment gaps. Staff should continue to consider the unique context of the school and the community it serves as part of their on-going self-evaluation. This will ensure the school identifies appropriate interventions and supports to raise attainment for all. It will be important to closely monitor these interventions and supports to ensure they are impacting positively on attainment and closing the gaps that exist.
- The school is in receipt of a small amount of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). This has been used to purchase resources to support the delivery of maths and a culture of reading across the school. We have asked the school to ensure PEF is used to raise attainment of targeted children as well as contributing to the school's planned universal support for literacy and numeracy. Close tracking of these targeted and universal supports should focus on raising attainment for children who face barriers to their learning.

Other relevant evidence

- All children with additional support needs, including those at Stage 1, should be better tracked by class teachers.
- Staff should be supported to be more outward looking, developing their professional learning to impact on attainment.
- Parental engagement should be developed in order to make sure all parents are more aware of and fully involved in their child's education.
- The school should take immediate account of Additional Support Legislation and Equalities legislation.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.