

9 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In December 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Dunscore Primary School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Dumfries and Galloway 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. 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.

Improve assessment approaches ensuring that teachers' professional judgement accurately shows children's progress through Curriculum for Excellence levels.

The curriculum is now better planned, with children's learning taking more account of what they already know. In addition, helpful guidance about each curriculum area is now in place for staff. This ensures that all staff, including visiting specialists and temporary teachers, plan learning more effectively. Included in the curriculum guidance are suggestions for how teachers can check on children's progress, using a range of different types of assessments. Staff now use such assessment information more effectively to understand gaps children may have in their learning. As a result, planned learning is better matched to children's learning needs.

The improvements that staff have made to assessment approaches are enabling children to make better progress in their learning. Working with staff in other schools in moderation activities, staff now have a deeper understanding of Curriculum for Excellence levels. Children have more opportunities to be challenged in their learning and apply their learning in new contexts. Moving forward, the school is well placed to continue to improve the quality of teachers' professional judgements about children's progress. In doing so, there is a need to ensure that attainment in all curricular areas continues to improve.

Raise children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. Ensure that all children experience high-quality learning and teaching. This includes checking that planned learning and interventions improve children's progress.

Improving learning and teaching is a focus across all children's learning. In literacy and numeracy, and children now make better progress and achieve higher standards of attainment. Teachers plan learning taking greater account of Curriculum for Excellence national guidance. As a result, children's skills in listening and talking, writing and reading have improved and they now achieve higher standards. Teachers are meeting more effectively the learning needs of all children. Higher quality learning and teaching experiences take place more often across the curriculum. Class work and interventions to help children learn are now planned at the right level for most children and make a positive difference to their progress.

Children are beginning to relate the skills they learn to the world of work. In addition, most children now see the relevance of their learning in everyday life. There has been insufficient time since the last inspection for the improvements in the quality of children's work to impact on overall levels measured by Curriculum for Excellence standards.

Raise expectations of children as independent learners. Develop their skills in knowing their strengths and what they need to do to improve.

Children talk positively about their experiences at Dunscore Primary school. They continue to benefit from a friendly environment and feel cared for by all staff who support them in their learning. Children work well independently in small groups on classroom tasks and activities. Teachers discuss targets with children during learning conversations. These are also discussed with parents. Children now talk more accurately about themselves as learners. Most know what they do well and what they need to do to improve.

Further develop the leadership skills of all staff working with children to increase the pace and impact of change within the school.

The headteacher's vision for Dunscore Primary school is understood by children, parents and staff. The acting principal teacher supports him very well and her work builds on the many positive developments already in place. She also leads developments that ensure children make better progress in areas of the curriculum. All staff are clearer about the school's strengths, areas for improvement and willingly take on additional tasks and leadership roles to improve children's experiences. Staff have clearly defined remits to ensure that planned improvements are now taken forward more effectively. As a result, well planned improvements impact positively on children's progress and experiences.

The school has an appropriate plan in place to continue to improve, taking account of their local context. As a result, curriculum developments and approaches to learning and teaching are applied more consistently across the school. There is a need for school leaders to continue, as planned, to involve children, parents and staff more fully in self-evaluation.

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. Dumfries and Galloway Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Elizabeth C Montgomery
HM Inspector