

16 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Banff Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in September 2019. 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.

The headteacher should improve arrangements for leadership across the school and nursery. She should take a more strategic lead on how improvements are identified, implemented and monitored.

There has been good progress made on this main point for action.

The headteacher is now well placed with staff and the depute headteachers to take forward the improvements needed. Aberdeenshire Council has supported the headteacher by providing more stability to the leadership team. The council has also provided more permanent staff to the teaching team. The headteacher and the leadership team have gained the confidence of most parents, children and staff. The school now has a calm purposeful environment for children to learn. Additional staffing helps the leadership team monitor and track the work of the school more effectively. As a result, they have a clearer idea of the schools strengths and areas for improvement. The headteacher and staff have taken positive steps to ensure that changes made are having a positive impact on children attainment. They have been successful in improving attainment and the quality of learning and teaching in most classes.

Overall, the nursery has continued to improve and adapt routines to cope with increased hours. All practitioners have visited other establishments to reflect on their own practice and to learn from others. They meet twice a week to discuss children's progress and plan learning. As a result, practitioners are more aware of what is working well and what still needs improved for children. Practitioners make increased use of the e-portfolios to capture significant hurdles in children's learning across the early level and identify next steps in learning.

In order to raise attainment, building on best practice already in the school and the nursery, staff should develop a consistency in approaches to learning and teaching.

There has been satisfactory progress on this main point for action.

Staff have worked together to agree what makes good learning and teaching. They have taken part in a range of professional learning to improve learning in classes. Most staff share the learning with children and encourage children to identify what they should work on to improve. As a result, learning and teaching in most classes is good. In a few classes, the pace of learning is still too slow. As a result, a few children are becoming disengaged in their learning. Staff should continue to work together and share good practice to ensure children receive high quality learning in all classes. Practitioners across the nursery continue to provide good interactions with children through play. They have made positive changes to the learning environment indoors to improve children's learning. More work needs done to continue to improve children's experiences outdoors.

Staff and the leadership team have worked well together to develop approaches to provide a nurturing school. This approach is helping meet the social and emotional needs of children and as a result, children's behaviour has improved. Much work has been done to ensure children have an understanding of how to respect others and keep themselves safe. Staff have strengthened the approach to developing children's skills and understanding in health and wellbeing. Most children now feel safe in school and that other children respect them as individuals. There is a need to continue to build on this good start to ensure all children have a full understanding of respecting others.

Staff should improve approaches to assessing, tracking and monitoring children's progress to support them in improving children's attainment in the school and nursery.

There has been satisfactory progress on this main point for action.

The leadership team has now streamlined the approach to assessment. Most teachers now use a variety of assessments to identify children's progress. The leadership team has provided staff with useful guidelines on the range of assessments they expect to be used in each class. This helps staff to identify areas of strength and gaps in children's learning. Staff should continue to build on this to link assessment more to planned learning. This will help staff to identify children requiring further support and challenge in their learning as early as possible.

The leadership team and staff track children's progress well. Staff meet with the leadership team and stage partners weekly to plan learning and track progress in learning. This approach has been useful in ensuring all staff have a clear focus on raising attainment. As a result, children's attainment is beginning to improve. At the early level, there are positive signs that children are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. At the first and second level children are making satisfactory progress in their learning.

The majority of children in the nursery continue to make good progress in developing skills in early language and communication, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Practitioners within the nursery are continuing to improve approaches to planning children's learning. They are increasingly responsive to children's interests and stage of development. Practitioners make observations of children's learning to help inform judgements about their progress. They are improving the information and detail they capture within these observations. They should now ensure these fully inform children's experiences across the playroom and outdoors.

Across the primary and nursery classes, staff should improve the curriculum in line with national guidance.

There has been satisfactory progress on this main point for action.

The leadership team has continued to provide progression pathways for all curriculum areas, which are linked to the National Benchmarks. Staff now use these more consistently in all classes. This allows children to build well on their previous learning in all subjects as they move through the school. Staff are beginning to make good use of the milestones for children with complex needs to help track their progress more effectively. They have made a good start to including children's interests and local events into topics covered. As a result, children are more engaged in this learning. Staff have made a good start to developing children's skills through real life contexts and the outdoors. There is a need to continue to make more use of the rich learning contexts surrounding Banff Primary School.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress in improving leadership across the school and satisfactory progress on the other areas for improvement 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. Aberdeenshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Sadie Cushley
HM Inspector