

27 June 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

**James McFarlane School
North Ayrshire Council**

In January 2016, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and North Ayrshire Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and young people 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/young people's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Provide opportunities for children to be more active in their learning.

Staff continue to provide a nurturing, calm environment which is helping to settle children and young people and support them to focus on their learning. Teachers confidently plan well-structured, relevant learning activities which ensure that learners at all stages are more engaged in tasks. Most children and young people are now challenged appropriately in their learning. Staff have a better understanding of their needs as individuals and ensure that tasks and activities take greater account of their abilities and interests.

Teachers, early years practitioners and classroom assistants consistently use a rich range of communication aids to help children and young people to be more active in their learning. They use symbols, pictures, signing, interactive technology and real objects effectively to support learner's understanding of tasks and help them to communicate their responses. Children and young people are regularly encouraged to be independent and to take greater responsibility for aspects of their learning. For example, staff allow extra time for learners to respond before intervening. They enjoy responsibilities such as collecting and organising the resources in lessons and independently travelling to and from school where appropriate. The school plans to provide specialist training and mentoring for less experienced staff. This will ensure that they have the necessary skills to match tasks and activities to the differing ability levels of children and young people.

Continue to develop the curriculum and relevant learning programmes in all subject areas.

The school has made significant progress in all aspects of its curriculum development across the primary and secondary classes. Staff have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that there is a clearer focus on relevant skills and progression in learning at all levels. For example, children and young people are now developing skills in accessing the community, cookery, routines, play and leisure and caring for themselves and others. Teachers focus on communication and literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing together with learning themes which include all areas of the curriculum. An important next step is to further develop approaches to tracking and evidencing children's and young people's progress across all subjects.

Senior managers and staff have ensured that there is a clear focus on skills for life and work at the senior phase. The school has taken important steps to improve young people's attainment and progress. Staff have increased opportunities for young people in the senior phase to demonstrate their achievements over time. Young people now achieve a wider variety of qualifications and awards including National Qualifications at Level 1, The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the John Muir Trust Award. The school is looking to extend these opportunities to children at the primary stages.

Further develop approaches to self-evaluation which lead to improvements in learning and teaching of all staff that support children and young people.

The school has made notable progress in developing a range of approaches which are leading to improvements in the quality of learning and teaching. The headteacher has ensured that lesson observations have a clearer focus on particular aspects of learning linked to identified areas for improvement. As a result, staff are reflecting on their practice with a focus on providing meaningful learning experiences. This has led to more consistent approaches to sharing learning intentions, very effective and consistent use of communication aids and high quality interactions with learners.

Staff at all levels lead on working groups in key areas such as literacy and communication, promoting positive behaviour, creativity and the ethos and life of the school. Staff are clearer in their understanding of what progression looks like for individual children across the curriculum and plan activities in different learning contexts to maximise available resources and facilities. More planned learning within the local community, coupled with better use of school resources such as the hydro pool and sensory suite are improving children's and young people's learning experiences. This is supporting learners to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy and skills for life and work. Young people are now better prepared for life after school. Planning for learners at the senior phase now includes work experience placements where appropriate and opportunities for young people to learn successfully in real life contexts. The Parent Council provides strong support to the school. Members work closely with the senior managers to ensure that parents know where they can access specialist help, advice and support.

What happens next?

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

Dr Kate Hannah
HM Inspector

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