

19 May 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Newburgh Mathers School and Nursery Class
Aberdeenshire Council**

In March 2014, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. 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 how the school has continued 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 how well children are now learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

How well do children learn and achieve?

At your child's school, more children now experience learning that is of a better quality. In the best cases, this has led to children's increased engagement and motivation in lessons. Most children are respectful and well-behaved. Most now work better in pairs and small groups. In a few classes, a minority of children would benefit from learning appropriate skills such as cooperation and good listening. This will improve their ability to work more effectively in groups. Following a review led by children, all learners now have the opportunity to contribute to the life of their school through community groups such as the eco, gardening or Fair Trade groups. Children now talk about their learning more and plan what they want to learn. For example, in the nursery they have begun to make use of floorbooks as a focus for such discussions and to record their learning. However, children's contributions to floorbook discussions are not yet well enough used by nursery staff to extend learning and follow children's interests. Across the primary and nursery classes, staff have adopted new approaches to helping children understand their own learning. We found that, as a result, more children are able to talk about what they do well and what they need to do to improve further. Children now require more regular opportunities to talk about their learning as their ability to do so varies considerably across the school. Nursery parents have free access to children's Learning Journeys. These Learning Journeys are in the very earliest stages of implementation and require more work to provide a better range of information for parents on their children's progress. Primary classes should now consider further opportunities to share Learning Journeys more to provide parents with more information on their children's progress. Parents could be encouraged to provide

more information on their children's achievements out of school to support further the development of Learning Journeys.

Across the nursery and primary classes, more children are now making consistent progress with their learning, especially in literacy, and are beginning to make better progress in numeracy. We found that more children now enjoy working on tasks related to numeracy and mathematics. In the nursery and at the primary stages, staff are beginning to track children's progress in literacy and numeracy. This information is increasingly used by staff to inform their planning and to ensure children make suitable progress. Throughout the nursery and primary classes, children are making the most progress where they have opportunities to apply what they have learned in real-life situations and in taking part in practical activities, such as those that were observed as part of the Science Week during the inspection. We discussed with the school how progress in all curriculum areas now needs to be tracked as closely as it is for literacy and numeracy. This will ensure children attain as highly as possible in all areas.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Across the nursery and primary classes, children continue to be well-cared for and to feel safe at school. Nursery children are now organised into key worker groups but staff do not yet make the most of the focused attention this allows them to have on individual children's needs. At the primary stages, staff have begun to focus more on matching tasks to children's learning needs. In the best cases, children's interests are the starting point for learning that is motivating and realistically challenging, and builds on what they already know. The school has identified the need to work with children and parents to develop further a shared understanding of what is appropriate challenge for all children as individual learners. The Support for Learning teacher has made a positive contribution to developing strong links with teachers, parents and external partners. This means that more children with additional needs in the primary classes are appropriately supported. Parents have opportunities to be involved in supporting their children's learning through accessing termly curriculum newsletters, social media, open afternoons, nursery 'stay and play' sessions, Learning Journeys and Logs. During the inspection, a number of parents throughout the school were involved in supporting learning opportunities in science, sharing their own professional expertise to enhance curriculum experiences. However, a significant minority of parents do not yet feel they are well enough informed about their children's education or the progress they are making. We have spoken with the school about working with parents formally and informally to ensure communication promotes further parental involvement in children's learning.

The school has made progress in ensuring children have opportunities to learn across all areas of Curriculum for Excellence. In developing their curriculum further, the school needs to ensure that children have appropriate opportunities to make good progress in all curriculum areas, as has begun to happen more consistently with literacy and numeracy. There is now a shared understanding amongst staff of what the school is trying to achieve for children through its curriculum. Teachers are now clearer about the expectations of Curriculum for Excellence. The school has plans to develop the curriculum further. In doing so, it should ensure that children and parents are fully involved in bringing about improvements. We have asked the

school to continue to ensure that children have opportunities to learn about their own local area and build on the wide range already available. A number of staff now take a leading role in developing aspects of the curriculum. Across the nursery and primary classes, children are now beginning to be more involved in planning their learning, building on their interests and ideas. The nursery has begun to share its weekly plans with parents so they are more aware of the learning going on there. The nursery has also begun to work more closely with early years' staff at the primary stages to improve children's transition into P1. However, some of these are recent developments and it is too early to evaluate their impact on children.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The headteacher has established herself with staff and children as an effective and supportive leader. She commands their respect and trust. She is developing an effective working relationship with the school community. Staff are now more fully involved in evaluating what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve. Therefore, they are better informed and more able to discuss the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. This has led to improved staff morale and a stronger sense of teamwork. Staff have more opportunities and are now more willing to take responsibility for leading on curriculum development and school improvements. This has allowed the school to move forward on a series of fronts at a faster pace than before. However, a number of improvements are in their early stages and have yet to fully show their impact on children's experiences and achievements. The nursery, in particular, has introduced a series of improvements very recently. These developments have not yet had time to demonstrate a positive impact on children. Across the nursery and primary classes, children are now more meaningfully involved in contributing to the life of their school and to their own learning. Parents continue to be consulted by the school on issues and improvements. They support events and performances very well. The school needs to continue to ensure that all parents feel able to contribute to improving its work. It should work in partnership with its Parent Council to improve further communication with a wider range of parents. This will provide all parents with the assurances they require about their children enjoying the best education they can.

What happens next?

Our Area Lead Officer will work with Aberdeenshire Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out another further inspection within eighteen months of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

Alasdair Eadie
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number. If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.