

3 December 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Torphins Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire 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 the overall quality of learning and teaching to better meet all children's needs and help to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy across the school.

The headteacher has supported positive improvements to the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

These changes are resulting in steady improvements to children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher has provided positive leadership to teachers to improve the consistency of learner experiences. He has established effective activities to evaluate the quality and consistency of teaching across the school. Teachers engage with professional learning positively and seek to improve their practice. They should now look outwards to learn from effective practice adopted by schools locally and beyond.

Staff foster caring and respectful relationships with almost all children across the school. They know children and families well. Children are well-mannered, welcoming and eager to learn. Most children demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. They enjoy increased opportunities to contribute to the wider life of the school through class responsibilities, such as acting as digital or eco leaders. As a result of these opportunities, children are developing their communication and collaboration skills. This is supporting the raising of attainment. In a minority of classes, where lessons are overly teacher-directed, a few children disengage from learning. The headteacher should continue to work with staff to ensure strategies to promote positive behaviour are used consistently.

Staff developed a toolkit outlining the expectations of high-quality learning and teaching. As a next step, the headteacher needs to engage widely with children, parents and partners and use their ideas to develop the toolkit further. The toolkit is supporting improvements in learning and teaching. For example, almost all teachers provide clear explanations and instructions to children and use praise to recognise children's efforts. Most teachers share the purpose of learning and measures of success routinely. This helps most children to explain with increasing confidence what they are learning and what they need to do next to improve.

Teams of teachers work and learn together to help improvements relating to teaching. They have developed their approaches to writing, numeracy and learning through play. They are starting to share this practice with colleagues to help embed new approaches across the

school. These improvements are impacting positively on the quality of learning and teaching. For example, children are more engaged when writing and are producing work of a higher standard.

The headteacher and teachers have supported improvements to children's written work in jotters. Most teachers now use questioning well to check for children's understanding. They should continue to develop the use of higher order questions in order to help all children to think deeply about their learning. A majority of teachers provide regular verbal feedback to children on their work. However, the quality of written feedback given to children is not yet of a consistently high quality across the school. Staff should continue to improve the quality of feedback children receive. Teachers should also engage children in regular conversations about their learning. This will better help children to set targets to support their next steps in learning.

Children are increasing the time spent on learning that develops their team work, independence, and which links to real-life contexts. A majority of teachers strive to give children greater responsibility of their learning and are reducing overly teacher led activities.

Ensure all learning activities are planned at the right level of difficulty to enable all children in the school to make appropriate progress in their learning.

The headteacher and teachers have made important improvements to their approaches to planning learning. This is improving teachers ability to plan learning which better meets the needs of individual children.

All teachers now routinely use local authority guidance to help them plan children's learning. They have developed a common approach to termly planning and share learning plans on a digital platform well. They work with their colleagues to ensure children receive learning that covers all areas of the curriculum. These approaches are helping teachers plan learning to better meet the needs of all children. This is ensuring children make appropriate progress in their learning. However, a majority of teachers still plan learning activities that lack challenge. These do not provide appropriate levels of pace and challenge for all learners. All teachers need to continue to plan activities which allow children to apply their learning through creative and relevant contexts. This includes the well-planned use of digital technology, outdoor learning and learning through play. This should improve further the engagement and motivation of children and accelerate their progress.

Staff have focused appropriately on improving children's learning which uses links across different subject areas. Children speak positively about their learning in this area. They are motivated and this has improved their engagement and progress. Children in the upper primaries are developing the ability to talk about the skills they develop through learning. Teachers should continue to help children to use skills to make further connections across their learning. This will help them to discuss how they are developing these skills over time in a meaningful and relevant way.

Support staff help teachers plan appropriately for children facing barriers to their learning. Staff should continue to strengthen the role of children, parents and partners in developing plans for children who require additional support.

There have been important improvements in teachers' planning. The majority of teachers should have higher expectations of what children can achieve in learning. Teachers should work together to develop further, their approaches to planning high quality learning experiences. This will ensure learning is planned at the right level of difficulty for all children.

Review approaches to tracking, monitoring and assessment in the primary stages to ensure that relevant information is gathered and used effectively to evaluate learning, inform planning and report on progress to parents.

The headteacher and teachers have made appropriate progress in addressing this area for improvement.

They have developed a helpful assessment calendar which ensures teachers use a range of assessments in literacy and numeracy routinely. Teachers have adopted more consistent approaches to assessment across the school. All teachers now appreciate the important role ongoing assessment plays in learning and teaching. They use assessments better to track the progress of children against national expectations and to plan children's next steps in learning. As a result, children are making better progress in their learning.

A few teachers use regular, informal assessments as part of lessons to routinely check on children's progress. A majority of teachers encourage children to engage with each other to seek peer feedback on their work. Teachers now need to work together to develop consistent approaches to the use of assessment while learning is happening. This will support teachers to adapt their teaching based on children's understanding and progress. Teachers should also extend their use of assessment to gather information of children's progress in other areas of the curriculum, beyond literacy and numeracy.

Teachers worked together and with colleagues from cluster schools to check they are applying national standards in writing appropriately. This helps teachers be more confident in their judgements of children's progress in writing. The headteacher should build on this by ensuring these opportunities happen regularly as part of the assessment calendar. He should extend the focus to all areas of literacy and numeracy, particularly listening and talking.

The headteacher has improved the school's approaches for checking the progress of children in literacy and numeracy. He meets with teachers regularly to discuss planning learning, and to review the progress and attainment of all children. Teachers have begun to use evidence regularly to evaluate the impact of interventions for children who are not on track, and to use this information to inform children's next steps. The headteacher tracks groups of children to ensure they are making appropriate progress in their learning. He is better able to evidence the progress of particular groups of children. He should continue to develop approaches to checking children's progress across the curriculum, beyond literacy and numeracy.

Teachers introduced learning journals to share aspects of children's learning and progress with parents. Most parents state that these learning journals have improved their understanding of what their child is learning. The majority of parents state that they receive helpful, regular feedback about how their child is learning and developing. They should, as planned, develop further the use of these journals, encouraging more input from children. This has the potential to improve children and parent's understanding of the progress

children make in their learning. Parents would benefit from further support in understanding how they can support their child's learning at home.

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

Jennifer Wadley
HM Inspector