

10 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In January 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Aberchirder 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.

The acting headteacher should engage all members of the school community to fully develop the vision, values and aims for the school and nursery setting. This should include clear agreement on children's rights and inform the rationale for the curriculum. She should develop a strategic plan to co-ordinate everyone to work together on the agreed priorities for improvement.

Overall, there has been positive progress made in taking this area forward. When the permanent headteacher returned to the school in August 2019, she took prompt action to develop a clear vision and defined values and aims for the school and nursery. She consulted with the whole school community to develop these. Children can talk about the new vision and values and are beginning to explore what these mean for them as pupils of Aberchirder Primary School. Time is required to embed these fully within the work of the school. The headteacher has worked with children and staff to create a curriculum rationale which describes how and what children will learn. She has started to engage with parents about the new curriculum rationale. She has developed a clear strategic plan which takes account of key priorities. However, progress in achieving specific targets now needs to be carefully measured and monitored. All staff should be involved in evaluating new developments to ensure that these are having the desired impact on learners. Children in the nursery class and primary classes have opportunities to lead aspects of improvement. Children in the pupil voice groups have developed action plans to take forward areas for improvement. In the nursery class, children are being encouraged to develop their leadership skills in meaningful ways, for example, they act as risk assessors to check the outdoor area before they go out to play. Staff are keen to improve the school and there is evidence of more collaborative working within the staff team. Teachers new to the school value the support and encouragement they are given by more experienced staff. There still remains considerable scope for staff to effect and embrace positive change within the school to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. In the nursery class, practitioners with support from the local authority are implementing positive change at a brisk pace. This is resulting in successful changes to the learning environments, both indoors and out. The team are very reflective about their practice and strive to do their best for the children in their care.

Teachers and early years practitioners should review their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure that children make the best possible progress in their learning. They need to make effective use of an appropriate range of information about children's progress and work together, and with colleagues from other schools and settings, to develop confidence in evaluating children's success.

Overall, there has been limited progress across the school in taking forward this area for improvement. Progress in the nursery in taking this forward is more positive. Practitioners are developing new approaches to planning children's learning. For the most part, this is 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 have made a start in using a new tracking and monitoring tool. The majority of children are able to talk about their 'rocket' learning targets and to describe the different ways by which they have successfully overtaken them. In a few lessons, children experience a higher quality of learning and teaching. The headteacher plans to share this good practice across the staff team. The headteacher and teachers have taken initial steps to explore a few features of effective learning and teaching. This ensures children are clearer about what they are learning and how to be successful. Teachers are at the very early stages of using feedback to support children to understand what they are doing well and how they can improve. They are at an early stage of using assessment information to plan children's next steps in learning. Across the school, there remains considerable scope to increase the pace of learning and raise the level of challenge for the majority of learners. The headteacher should develop further approaches to quality assurance to ensure feedback given to teachers leads to improvements in the classroom. There remains a need for teachers to develop clear and flexible learning pathways, which support planning and progression for all children. This should provide better support for the different learning needs of individuals and groups. Teachers should also develop ways in which children can be more directly involved in planning and leading their own learning. Around one third of children reported in the questionnaires that that they are not consulted about what they would like to learn in school.

Across the school and nursery setting, staff need to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to 'Getting it right for every child' and that these inform every aspect of their practice. Ensure a clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements for all children and ensure that they are supported to maximise their successes and achievements. Children should have a clearer voice in helping to plan and evaluate approaches to improving their wellbeing.

There has been limited progress in taking this area for improvement forward. Most of the development actions which were identified at the original inspection have still to be addressed. Progress in taking this area for improvement forward in the nursery class has been more successful. In the nursery class, the team continue to develop their understanding of their responsibilities in relation to 'Getting it right for every child'. There are positive indications that they are now meeting children's needs more effectively. Practitioners have fostered respectful and kind relationships with the children in their care. As a result, most children are settled, happy and engaged in learning. Almost all parents report that they are very happy with their children's nursery experiences. The nursery team have created mascots to represent each of the wellbeing indicators. There are early indications that this is helping children to gain an understanding of different aspects of being safe, healthy and

responsible in the nursery. Children at the primary stages are becoming increasingly aware of the wellbeing indicators. Teachers are at the early stages of using these as a focus in health and wellbeing lessons. The headteacher has introduced a number of programmes to support children's wellbeing and has also facilitated professional learning to increase staff's understanding of how they can deliver these. Teachers now need to ensure that the programmes are used consistently across the school. They need to revisit recent professional learning on developing positive classroom environments, this learning should influence classroom practice. The headteacher and staff should continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of new programmes and approaches to ensure they are leading to improved outcomes for children. As indicated in the original inspection, staff should develop effective ways to monitor and track children's progress in the area of health and wellbeing to help them improve further outcomes for all. This should include children's progress in knowledge and understanding as well as the skills they are developing. It is important that all teachers develop a full understanding of the needs of children who may be facing barriers to their learning. In doing so, they should ensure they consistently apply strategies to support all children to make the best possible progress.

As a matter of priority, improve the attainment and achievement of all children in the school and nursery setting. Teachers and practitioners should fully develop a detailed understanding of children's progress in learning through tracking and monitoring. Through this they should identify, and take action to remove, any barriers that children may have to their learning.

Across the school, there has been limited progress in taking this area for improvement forward. Progress in taking this area for improvement forward in the nursery class has been more successful. The majority of children in the nursery continue to demonstrate their developing skills in early language and communication, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Children are making insufficient progress in their learning across the curriculum. The school and local authority should take prompt action to address this. The headteacher has introduced a new local authority progress tracking tool. She recognises the potential of this to support staff to better track children's progress in learning. The headteacher and teachers are beginning to use the data available to identify potential barriers to children's learning. Children in the school have more opportunities to develop important life skills in different ways, for example, as part of their participation in pupil voice groups. The new curriculum rationale identifies the need for children to have meaningful and relevant contexts in which they can enjoy success. As planned, the headteacher should develop further approaches to track and monitor children's participation and the skills they are developing. In doing so, she should ensure all children are given opportunities for achievement which are appropriate to their needs and aspirations.

What happens next?

The school has made insufficient progress in addressing the areas for improvement since the original inspection. We will liaise with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Aberdeenshire Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector