

25 March 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

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

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including developing children's involvement in their own learning. We also looked at how the school and nursery make use of the outdoor environment to enhance children's learning. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

**How well do children learn and achieve?**

In the nursery, most children are confident and keen to join in with an appropriate balance of following their own interests and adult-led activities. However, a number of children need more support to settle for sustained periods of time at activities. Children in the nursery need to be more involved in discussing their learning and planning next steps. In the primary classes, most children engage well with their learning, especially where it is not too teacher-led and motivates them through being appropriately challenging. Children's learning is not of a consistently high enough standard across the school and nursery. The school and nursery have begun to use personal learning plans (PLPs) to monitor and record individual achievement and progress. These PLPs should now be developed further to give children a greater awareness of what they do well and what they need to do to improve. PLPs can also be developed to provide parents with greater understanding of their children's progress and allow them to share success and wider achievement out of school. All children are involved in working groups which are beginning to contribute to improving the school. For example, the Fair Trade group organised a fund-raising fashion show involving children, families and the local community. Children could now take on greater leadership roles within such groups in the way the older children take responsibility for the Num Num Nibbles tuck shop.

In the nursery, most children are confident communicators who freely share their thoughts, feelings and experiences with others. A few are beginning to show an interest in writing for themselves. Most children are developing an awareness of numbers which they apply in their play, for example playing board games and using the interactive whiteboard. However, children do not have enough opportunities to develop their literacy or numeracy skills during planned nursery activities. Nursery

staff do not track children's progress closely. Information on children's progress in the nursery is limited. This means they do not have enough information to plan children's learning to be appropriately challenging. In the primary classes, children's progress with their learning is too slow in the early stages but their progress improves over time as they move through the school. Children across the primary classes talk confidently and are keen to share opinions. Most listen well to the teacher and each other. Most children read a broad range of materials and show a good level of understanding of what they have been reading. Across the stages, children's writing is good but would benefit from further work to promote greater personal expression. Children could be making better progress with developing their numeracy and mathematics skills. In some classes children have opportunities to develop these skills in a consistent way and apply them in real-life situations. In these classes children are motivated and doing well. There now needs to be a more consistent approach to teaching numeracy and mathematics across the primary classes to ensure all children achieve as highly as possible. Children understand the role of exercise in promoting good health and participate in regular activity through a range of sports and activities provided at lunchtime and after school, in physical education lessons and through festivals and school sporting events.

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

Across the school, children are well cared for but their learning could be more challenging. Nursery staff show good levels of care for the children but the way the nursery room is set up is not stimulating enough. Children do not experience learning in all curriculum areas. In a few primary classes, children are appropriately challenged by the tasks, activities and resources that teachers plan and deliver. In such lessons, children are engaged and motivated learners who feel empowered and able to shape and direct their own learning to follow their interests. In such cases, teachers are willing to take note of such interests and incorporate them into the learning. Such experiences now need to be developed across all classes so that all children experience consistently challenging learning. Where children require additional support for their learning, school staff work very well together, often with input from parents and external partners. Overall, however, parents are not yet fully enough involved in supporting their children's learning.

Across the school and nursery, staff use Curriculum for Excellence guidance to plan learning. Children do not yet play a full enough role in planning that learning. Staff confidence is growing in developing curriculum courses. For example, there is a consistent approach to teaching writing skills. Such progress is now required for other curriculum areas, especially numeracy and mathematics. The nursery uses the outdoor environment effectively for learning. For example, the children took part in the national Big Bird Watch and noted the bird life in their garden area. The primary classes use the outdoors well to enhance learning, for example, for physical activities such as orienteering. Older children visit the local Ythan Estuary and ranger service. This could be expanded further over time. Transition from nursery into the primary focuses on welcoming children and caring for them as individuals. These arrangements need to be more focused on children's learning. Staff work well with colleagues from Ellon Academy to prepare children for high school. For example, children in P6 and P7 join their peers from the other local primaries for shared residential experiences to help build relationships.

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

The school has made strong progress since the appointment of the current headteacher but there is still more improvement required, notably in the nursery class and in developing greater consistency for children across the primary classes. The headteacher has led the school very well through this early progress. However, there is considerable headroom across the primary and nursery classes for improvements to learning, teaching and the curriculum. Parents and children could also be more meaningfully involved in contributing to and leading school improvement. The school now needs to establish consistently high quality learning for all children. This needs to be supported by teachers making more effective use of information from tracking individual children's progress. This information also needs to be shared more fully with parents.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Children who are confident and eager to learn.
- The leadership of the headteacher in developing a clear vision for the future improvement of the school.
- The strong teamwork between support staff and teachers to ensure children are well cared for.
- The work underway to enable children to learn in the outdoors and about outdoors.

We discussed with staff and Aberdeenshire Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Ensure all involved in the life of the school are fully engaged in taking forward and, where appropriate, leading improvement in the school and nursery.
- Continue to develop the curriculum to ensure children can improve their skills and have the right amount of challenge.
- Continue to raise standards of learning and teaching across the school and nursery in order to raise attainment.

## **What happens at the end of the inspection?**

As a result of our inspection findings we think that your school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Education Scotland will work with Aberdeenshire Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further inspection within one year 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

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/NewburghMathersSchoolAberdeenshire.asp>

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.

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