23 August 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

Port Erroll 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 acting 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 acting 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 the emerging impact of collaborative work to improve the school and how children are provided with feedback to improve their 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?

Relationships with staff in the nursery are positive which results in children feeling safe and secure. Children are friendly and caring towards each other and readily talk about the friendships that they are forming. As a result of their learning experiences in the playroom, outdoors, in the garden and in a nearby natural area children are becoming more confident. Individual children's achievements are recognised by being displayed in the playroom and in their profiles. A next step is to develop a more child-friendly profile to help engage children in discussing their progress and next steps in learning. The approach to learning in the nursery has recently been changed to give children a variety of activities and they are enjoying choosing what, and who, to play with. We have asked staff to further develop these approaches to allow children to follow their own curiosity and build their independence as learners.

In the school children are happy, friendly and polite. They have a positive attitude towards learning. The focus on promoting positive behaviour and the school values is having a positive impact on the ethos within the school. Almost all children enjoy their learning at school and talk regularly with teachers about how to improve their learning. Most children feel they are listened to and their views are acted upon. Children work collaboratively in pairs or groups to link their learning across different curricular areas. Their learning is enhanced through visits to local places of interest, for example, Castle Fraser, Aden Country Park and the Maritime Museum. They are developing respect for the environment through community projects such as the 'Green Power' project. In the P6/7 class and across the school all children are regularly involved in fund raising to support a range of local and national charities including, Cash for Kids, Sports Relief, and MacMillan Cancer Support. These children are developing responsibility

Education Scotland
Johnstone House
50-54 Rose Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1UD

T 0131 244 4474
F 0300 244 9443
E aberdeen@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk
Text relay service 18001+ 0131 244 4330
This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.
www.educationscotland.gov.uk

and contribute to the life of the school and community through the John Muir Award scheme. The school has achieved an Eco Schools Scotland Silver Award. Overall school data indicates that almost all children in the school are performing in line with national expectations in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. However the school does not yet have enough reliable information about children's progress to be fully confident that all children are making the progress they are capable of. The acting headteacher has introduced a new tracking system so that children's progress can be evaluated more accurately. While there are early indications of improvements in children's progress in reading and writing, there remains scope to improve the pace of progress in numeracy and literacy. We have asked staff to develop robust assessment, based on clear programmes of learning, to support the new tracking system which is being put in place.

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

A range of activities often linked to sport enhance the learning experiences beyond the classroom for the children, particularly in the upper stages. This includes football, tennis and hockey which are held at Port Erroll. In the Green Project, a promising start has been made to working with partners such as Score Group Plc, Scottish Hydro, British Petroleum and The Wood Group. This now needs to be developed to provide appropriate contexts for all children to develop their learning and skills for learning, life and work. However the development of the curriculum across the nursery and primary school is still at an early stage and lacks sufficient progression and depth for learners. This needs to be addressed as a priority. We have asked the school to proceed with plans to involve children, parents and partners in the further development of the curriculum rationale. This will ensure that all children have opportunities for an appropriate and broad range of learning.

Across the nursery and school, staff know the children and their families very well and provide appropriately for their health and wellbeing. In the nursery, the majority of activities and resources are well-matched to the individual needs of children for most of the time. We have asked staff to ensure that purposeful learning is maintained for the whole of each session. We have also asked staff in the nursery to ensure that learning needs are consistently identified, with clear plans put in place to support children. Such plans should also be regularly reviewed and evaluated. At the primary stages the acting headteacher monitors the progress of those with additional support, including looked-after children. Learning needs are identified effectively and there is involvement of appropriate partner agencies in ensuring that these needs are addressed. Pupil Support Assistants are involved in aspects of school life and are utilised well to make an effective contribution in supporting children within the classroom. We have asked teachers to ensure that they take account of children's prior learning and their stage of development when planning learning. We have also asked that, across the nursery and school, greater pace and challenge is provided in learning so that all children can make appropriate progress at a rate appropriate to them.

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

The acting headteacher is improving the climate for learning and the school's reputation in the community. She is encouraging staff to be reflective. They are keen

to make the improvements that they know are required. Together they have established a positive and respectful ethos in the school which is able to provide a sound basis from which further improvements can be made. Effective processes are in place to ensure the professional development and review of all teachers. Teachers are starting to take on leadership roles in the school and are beginning to identify and share good practice. We have asked staff to ensure that their self-evaluation is more rigorous and evidence-based in order to impact fully on the quality of children's learning. This needs to involve children, parents and partners and have a more effective impact on improvements for all learners.

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the nursery class had no requirements and nine recommendations. From these, four recommendations have been met and one partially met. Outstanding issues relating to developing children's involvement in their profiles and evaluation of their experiences, monitoring first aid boxes and risk assessment procedures are carried forward in this inspection. As a result of this inspection, one requirement and seven recommendations have been made.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Children who are polite and keen to develop their learning.
- Recent improvements in developing a positive environment for learning.
- The commitment of the headteacher and staff to engage in professional development.

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.

- Increase the pace of developing the curriculum to ensure appropriate progression and depth in learning.
- Develop robust systems of self-evaluation that lead to well-paced change, consistently high-quality learners' experiences and improved outcomes for learners.
- Better meet the needs of individual learners and work in collaboration with children, parents and partners to identify next steps in learning.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. 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 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.

David Drysdale
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/PortErrollSchoolAberdeenshire.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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