

# Summarised inspection findings

**Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class**

Aberdeenshire Council

22 January 2019

## Key contextual information

The setting offers provision for children aged from three years to those not yet attending primary school. Currently 17 children attend morning sessions and 13 attend afternoons. The majority will be transitioning to P1 in August 2019.

Accommodation is within Aberchirder Primary School and consists of a playroom with a kitchen area, an enclosed outdoor area, toilets and reception corridor. The setting also have use of the gym hall within the primary school.

The setting is staffed by a lead practitioner and a team of three practitioners under the management of the acting headteacher. The acting headteacher has been in post for 10 weeks.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

**weak**

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement change should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the setting and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The setting's values were recently reviewed as part of a whole school initiative led by the acting headteacher. The values are based around wellbeing and respect and they reflect the aspirations for children and families in the school community. As the acting headteacher has identified, there is now a need to refresh the vision and aims within the whole school community. As part of this, practitioners should work towards involving parents and children in this process to ensure shared understanding which reflects the context of the setting within the school and the wider community.
- On a day-to-day basis, the lead practitioner has responsibilities for the setting. She is working towards a further qualification that includes research and awareness of current thinking in early learning. As a result, she plays a role in motivating others. The practitioner team work well together. They value each other's skills and want to do their best to support children's learning and development. They are keen to review and refresh their practice to ensure the provision continues to meet the needs of children. During the inspection practitioners engaged well with inspectors to develop further their understanding of continuous improvement. The acting headteacher and the team of practitioners work well together. Positive relationships are developing to support the team to benefit from an inclusive approach in which they are part of the whole school community. For example, practitioners attend whole-school events and children share learning experiences with older children in the school.
- Strategic direction is now required to ensure that the setting is delivering high-quality early learning and childcare. Practitioners are receptive to the ongoing advice and guidance from the local authority teacher on ways to improve. She has supported the team in beginning to reflect upon and develop their work. Practitioners recognise that self-evaluation is still at an early stage of development. With support, they are improving their use of national guidance *How good is our early learning and childcare?* to review a few important areas. However, the current systems in place are not yet supporting continual improvement. Practitioners need

more rigorous and robust self-evaluation to enable them to identify priorities to improve the setting and target important outcomes for children's learning. This should support improvement at an appropriate and increased pace of change

- As yet there is no formal monitoring of professional practice or of children's progress in learning. Overall the acting headteacher should improve quality assurance methods in order to support practitioners in recognising where effective progress has been made as a result of change and what still needs to be improved. This would contribute to self-evaluation and identify areas for professional development.
- The school's annual improvement plan includes priorities for the setting. In taking these forward the acting headteacher has identified a few key targets for the setting. Practitioners recognise that the identification of targets should reflect the setting's own self-evaluation to ensure the most relevant targets are consistently taken forward.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experience for young children. It highlights the importance of a very good understanding of child development and early learning pedagogy. Effective use is made of observation to inform future learning and identify the progress made. Children are involved in planning for their own learning. Together these ensure children's successes and achievements are maximised. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of interactions
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Practitioners have positive and caring relationships with children. Children are warmly welcomed each day and as a result, feel safe and secure. They interact well with their friends and adults and are happy in the setting. Most children demonstrate an appropriate level of engagement in their learning through purposeful play and some real-life experiences, for example cutting vegetables to make pumpkin soup, making playdough by following a recipe and washing dishes in the home corner. Learning experiences sustain the interest of most children and help them develop their independence, curiosity and confidence. Children are able to make choices about what they would like to learn. They engage with a range of interesting experiences available to them both indoors and outdoors. Practitioners should ensure there are opportunities for daily, free-flow play between indoors and outdoors.
- Practitioners are responsive and support learning on an individual basis through sensitive interactions. They listen to the views of children and are developing appropriate questioning techniques to support and extend children's thinking further. Practitioners know children's individual care and learning needs well. They provide opportunities for them to follow their interests, for example, exploring colour mixing for fireworks pictures.
- Children's individual folders document learning over time. However, these include a limited number of observations of play and examples of children's work. Practitioners recognise the need to continue to develop their practice in gathering observations of significant learning to build a more coherent picture of children's learning. This should inform next steps and therefore improve the learning cycle overall. Children would benefit from more focused conversations about their individual learning to help them review their progress and identify next steps.
- Practitioners meet regularly and use their knowledge of individual children's interests and needs as a basis for planning learning. They are benefitting from continued support from the local authority to strengthen the links between observation, planning and assessment. This is helping them to clearly identify children's needs and emerging interests and how these link to the curriculum. Further use of national guidance and professional dialogue can help to extend practitioners knowledge of child development and early learning pedagogy.
- Practitioners have introduced 'big book planning' to involve children in their learning. These record children's comments and have photographs of learning experiences. Practitioners use 'mind maps' to find out children's ideas. They should consider how they can now develop these approaches to ensure that they provide appropriate depth and challenge in children's learning.

- Practitioners have recently introduced a tracking and monitoring system to identify children's progress in their learning. They recognise that this system needs time to develop fully to allow them to make more confident judgements about children's progress and what their next steps might be.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning and development pathways

- A curriculum rationale needs to be developed to reflect the uniqueness of the setting and aspirations for the learning and achievement of all children. As this develops it will be important to take full account of curriculum design principles to provide greater depth, choice and challenge in children's learning.
- Planning for children's learning broadly takes account of national and authority guidance. Practitioners make increasing use of the experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence to plan for children's learning. As the process for planning develops, practitioners should ensure they are planning for progression in learning across all curriculum areas
- Practitioners acknowledge that continued use of national guidance such as Building the Ambition will support them to explore current best practice in creating quality environments. The development of the outdoor area is giving a greater focus to outdoor play in children's learning. This is allowing children to develop skills of investigation in a real-life context.
- There is scope for practitioners to increase opportunities for children to develop their skills literacy and numeracy across the playroom and outdoors. They would also benefit from more regular opportunities to develop skills in the use of digital technologies. Health and wellbeing learning is well-planned and delivered appropriately.
- Transitions from home to the setting and from setting to school are well established. Transitions into school are beginning to focus more on continuity and progression in learning. These are supported across the school year by practitioners and teaching staff who provide shared learning experiences between the setting and school. A recent literacy project provided a useful way of bringing practitioners and teachers together to plan for progression in learning and continuity of curriculum experiences across the early level. This work was shared with parents at 'come and play day' where staff led a discussion on the importance of play for children's learning and development. Parents value these supportive approaches to smooth their child's transition experience.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on children and families – parental engagement

- Practitioners have established positive links with parents, families and the wider community in order to improve outcomes for all children. Parents feel welcome in the setting and confirm that practitioners work in partnership with them to care and share in their children's learning and development.
- An 'Oli Octopus' display informs parents of the focus of children's daily learning. Informal conversations with parents and planned meetings allow parents the opportunity to find out more about their children's learning. Children's folders record their learning and are shared regularly with parents. We discussed with practitioners how these could now be used to engage parents more directly in supporting their children's learning.
- Events to support family learning are organised in the school. For example, during the week of inspection, parents were invited to attend information evening. Commendably, school teaching staff and practitioners presented a workshop to support parents to develop an awareness of early literacy and how this will be taken forward across the early years and into school.
- Helpful notices in the entrance corridor and termly newsletters ensure parents are kept informed about events that are taking place within the setting and school community. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the setting through a variety of initiatives in such as sharing their views and helping with specific projects. They provide good support to the setting and school community through supporting fundraising events.

## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The setting submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the setting and the education authority that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

This indicator reflects on the setting's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- There is a warm, caring atmosphere within the setting. Children, families and practitioners are treated in a fair and just way which promotes equality and inclusion. Positive relationships are role modelled by practitioners effectively. They use praise and language to reinforce the simple rules of the setting. As a result children are polite, well-mannered and are learning to be kind in sharing and taking turns. From observations almost all children appear to feel relaxed and confident as they play.
- Practitioners have an understanding of the wellbeing indicators in relation to Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and work to ensure that children are safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving respected, responsible and included. Their understanding of GIRFEC now needs to be deepened and shared in a meaningful way with children and families. As part of this, practitioners should explore the wellbeing indicators to support children in talking about their feelings and developing the ability in making decisions that affect them.
- Children are offered responsibilities to take lead roles, such as ordering and preparing snacks and risk assessing aspects of their outdoor play. Practitioners should build on this good work by increasing the opportunities available to children to develop early leadership skills in the playroom.
- Practitioners know each child and family well and are responsive to their needs and interests. They are aware of individual circumstances and treat children as individuals. This includes how best to support those who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Practitioners seek appropriate help at an early stage for children who may require additional support in their learning including the referral to other agencies.
- Practitioners keep up to date with developments in early learning and childcare in order that they fulfil their statutory duties. They are clear of their responsibilities to keep children safe. Practitioners are responsive in their approach to care and wellbeing. They collate a range of information to meet the care needs of children in the form of personal plans. Records should now more effectively detail all necessary information, in line with legislative requirements, about how children are learning and developing.
- The backgrounds and interests of all children and families are valued and respected by practitioners. They encourage children and their families to share celebrations and festivals that are important to them. However, practitioners recognise that they need to increase learning about equality and diversity within the setting to promote children's understanding of wider society.

### 3.2 Securing children's progress

satisfactory

This indicator relates to the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children. It requires clear understanding of early learning and development and pedagogy. It reflects the integrated way young children learn and the importance of experiences and development happening on an individual basis within a supportive, nurturing and stimulating environment. High quality early learning and childcare contributes significantly to enhancing children's progress and achievement as they grow and learn. It can benefit all children by closing the attainment gap and ensuring equity for all. It is about the holistic nature of development and learning ensuring these foundations are secure in order to achieve future attainment success. The themes are:

- progress in communication, early language, mathematics, and health and wellbeing
- children's progress over time
- overall quality of children's achievement
- ensuring equity for all children

- Children are making satisfactory progress in early communication and language. Almost all children listen to and carry out instructions well. They engage in conversations with their friends and adults through different learning experiences and are encouraged to use a range of vocabulary when talking about their learning experiences. The majority of children ask questions linked to their learning. Children enjoy a story being read to them by an adult. Opportunities for mark making are available in the setting and a few of the older children are developing an interest in recognising letters and writing their name. They would benefit from more opportunities to develop their early literacy skills both, indoors and outdoors in meaningful play and real life experiences.
- Children are making satisfactory progress in early numeracy and mathematics. Through routines and play experiences they are learning about counting, shape and colour. Older children are learning to count within 10 and are developing awareness of how numbers represent quantities. They were observed using recognition of numerals to count items at snack. Most children use mathematical language in different play contexts, for example, more and less, bigger and smaller, when comparing construction models. They were observed measuring in the sand and water using different containers. Early numeracy experiences could be extended across the setting to build more depth, challenge and progression in children's learning.
- Children are making satisfactory progress in health and wellbeing through daily interactions where being kind and respectful is a focus. Children are caring and considerate of each other's feelings. They show familiarity with hand washing and tooth brushing and benefit from helping to prepare snack. Most children play independently across the learning environment and are developing their self-help skills. Children have the opportunity to develop fine motor skills through playdough and writing tools. Outdoors they have opportunities to run, jump and climb and use wheeled toys.
- In the outdoor area children are developing their skills of exploration and investigation. They explore rolling apples along different pipes, making 'soup' in the mud kitchen by using different sized containers and watching mud change as they add coloured sand. Children have opportunities to grow vegetables and flowers and explore living things in the environment.

- Practitioners have been developing loose parts play in the setting. Children enjoy making pictures using transient art. By extending the use of open ended resources, children will have more scope to develop imaginative play and creativity through child-led experiences.
- An early level project on water allowed children to explore real-life learning opportunities such as floating and sinking, growing and bathing babies. This linked with different curricular areas. Through this children developed key skills such as co-operation and problem solving. Children in the setting and Primary 1 shared their learning with their families. This project allowed early level staff to share with families an example of progression and continuity of learning across early level.
- During the inspection, children were observed to be developing a range of skills across the curriculum. However, there is not yet enough robust evidence to clearly show the progress children are making in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Practitioners should ensure that they use their observations to demonstrate the progress children are making over time.
- Children's achievements are recognised through effective use of praise and good communication with families. Practitioners recognise the importance of celebrating children's wider achievements and these are captured on a 'WOW' wall and in the children's learning folders.
- Practitioners have an understanding of the individual circumstances of children and families. There is an inclusive and supportive ethos. Practitioners should now use the information about children and families to identify strategies to reduce barriers and ensure effective learning for all children.

## Setting choice of QI: 1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement

- Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation
- Evidenced based improvement
- Ensuring impact of success for children and families

- Practitioners are increasingly reflecting on their practice through self-evaluation activities. This is beginning to support the identification of aspects that are working well and others that need to be developed. We discussed with the team how more effective use could be made of national guidance *How good is our early learning and childcare?* to accurately identify strengths and areas for development. More planned regular meetings would provide practitioners with opportunities to evaluate their practice and provision in greater depth. A clear link between self-evaluation and identified priorities for improvement should now be developed. This would support confidence within the team in implementing change to improve outcomes for children in their learning.
- Practitioners value the contribution of children and families and use a range of methods to consult with them and gain their views. They ensure that the views of parents are acted upon. There is scope to increase the extent of this so everyone has a clear, shared understanding of what the setting is trying to achieve.
- Practitioners are developing their skills in making observations of children's learning. As a result, they are beginning to evidence children making satisfactory progress across aspects of their learning. There is a need for the acting headteacher to develop quality assurance methods in order to monitor practice. This would support practitioners to identify areas for professional development and contribute to self-evaluation.
- Practitioners should also now look outwards professional learning opportunities which can link closely to plans for improvement to ensure maximum impact. There will be benefit in continuing to seek ways to engage in collegiate working with early years colleagues across the cluster, local authority and further afield.

## Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.