

2 July 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Heathryburn Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeen City Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the nursery class 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 nursery class 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 nursery class has made and how well this is supporting children's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Staff need to improve the quality and consistency of learning and teaching across the school and nursery. This will support children's improved progress and attainment in literacy and numeracy.

The school and nursery continue to be warm and friendly environments for children and families. The headteacher has taken a strong and focused approach to developing effective practice in learning and teaching in the nursery. There is clear evidence that this is improving children's experiences. Teachers at the early primary stages plan very well together to provide high-quality learning through engaging play approaches.

The headteacher and promoted staff have provided helpful guidance and training for practitioners on the best way to plan and record observations of children's learning. As a result, staff now plan learning experiences that are more motivating and interesting for children. Most children become engrossed in their play. There are missed opportunities when staff could intervene more quickly when a few children require some adult support. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to work towards achieving consistently high-quality interactions with all children.

Staff are planning a better range of experiences to enhance children's early literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, most children are making good progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, appropriate to their stage of development. Many children enjoy listening to stories in the cosy library area. A few children enjoy retelling their favourite stories, using 'story spoons' and puppets. Children have daily opportunities to practice their writing skills in their play. A minority of children can write their own name and enjoy making signs for playroom displays. Most children recognise numbers to 10 and can sort and match shapes and colours during tabletop games. A few children can confidently count beyond 20. The majority of children use mathematical language correctly, for example when they play with water and sand, explaining when cups and bottles are empty, full or half full. Practitioners should continue to develop ways to plan more challenging learning for a few able children.

The headteacher, senior leaders, and staff should improve the quality of play-based learning across the early level. This will support children to experience learning that promotes creativity, curiosity and investigate play.

Staff have made very effective changes to the layout of the playroom, creating inviting spaces for children to develop their curiosity and creativity. Children can choose from a variety of stimulating and interesting resources, including natural materials and loose parts. Practitioners make good use of the nursery garden area and encourage all children to access the outdoors at some point every day.

Almost all children are happy and settled in the nursery. Children who are new to the setting are supported sensitively by practitioners. Most children are confident in choosing where they want to play. They help with nursery routines, such as preparing snack, and most show kindness toward each other. Staff could now consider more ways for children to develop responsibility, by taking on additional roles as monitors and helpers.

Overall, most children are motivated and enjoy their play. Practitioners support and encourage children to become independent, for example, when they are getting ready for outdoors and making their own sandwiches. The majority of children play for extended periods of time, for example, in the block play area, reading and listening to stories and outdoors riding bikes. A minority of children move frequently between activities and would benefit from more support from staff to engage more fully in their experiences. Staff should continue to share practice in how they can support all children to explore their interests in more depth and apply their skills in challenging ways.

Teachers at P1 are embedding play pedagogy very well into their practice. Teachers are working with staff from the University of Aberdeen to continuously improve and refine their approaches to learning through play. Staff in the nursery and primary classes should continue to share knowledge and expertise to ensure children make a smooth transition as they move from nursery into P1.

The headteacher needs to make significant improvement to the leadership of change in the nursery. Senior leaders and staff, supported by the local authority, should work together to develop approaches to evaluating, monitoring and tracking the work of the nursery and improve children's progress in learning.

The local authority has provided regular, high-quality support to the nursery team to help them to make important improvements. The headteacher now provides strong leadership and direction for the nursery staff team. Along with the deputy headteacher, she supports and guides the team very effectively. This is leading to a brisk pace of change, much improved standards of provision and better outcomes for children.

Promoted staff are leading important improvements to the nursery curriculum and children's learning is now of much better quality. Practitioners feel confident and more empowered to try new ideas. Going forward, the headteacher has identified the need to encourage practitioners to take on more leadership roles linked to improving the nursery.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have taken practical steps to ensure they have protected time to carry out their leadership and management responsibilities effectively. The

headteacher has developed a calendar of monitoring activities to ensure key areas of practice in the nursery are reviewed on a regular basis. There are now methodical systems and processes in place for the headteacher and staff to evaluate the work of the nursery on an ongoing basis across the year. The headteacher and staff now have an accurate, evidence-based view of the strengths and areas for further development in the nursery.

Senior leaders and practitioners should improve the planning of the nursery curriculum to ensure children receive a broad range of learning experiences appropriate to their needs. Practitioners should plan learning taking account of children who require additional support, as well those who require increasing challenge.

Senior leaders and staff have reviewed the vision, values and aims of the nursery and made these relevant for children and families. They have reviewed the curriculum rationale for the nursery and shared this with parents. Senior leaders and practitioners now offer a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of children in the nursery. The staff team have improved their approaches to planning children's learning significantly. As a result, children now benefit from their full entitlement to Curriculum for Excellence.

Practitioners know children very well as individuals and are responsive to their interests and needs. There are appropriate personal plans in place for all children, including those who need additional support. Individual children's plans are detailed, up to date and reviewed regularly by staff and parents. Most practitioners are developing their use of questioning well to extend children's learning in early literacy and numeracy. They encourage children to read familiar letters and sounds and count items relevant to their play. Children have increasing opportunities to develop as successful learners and effective communicators through their play and learning. A next step is for staff to challenge children to develop as responsible citizens and effective contributors. This includes encouraging children to apply their literacy and numeracy skills through daily routines and the life of the nursery.

What happens next?

The school has made clear progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on continued progress within one year of this inspection visit. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit. When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with Aberdeen City Council that we intend to take.

Lesley A McEwing
HM Inspector