

23 April 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Banchory 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.

Senior leaders need to work with staff across the school and nursery to provide clear, strategic leadership. This leadership should result in focused improvement priorities to improve children's progress and attainment across all areas of the curriculum. There is a need for improved communication across the school to ensure a shared understanding of expectations and standards.

The local authority worked with the headteacher to create an action plan following the initial inspection. The plan is beginning to help the leadership team set improvement priorities with a stronger focus on improving children's experiences across the school. The headteacher has taken steps to share with the school community the schools' strengths, and areas where improvement is needed. She should build on this work to ensure all staff, parents and children are able to contribute their views on what is working well and the areas they would like to improve.

The headteacher has taken a few steps to improve communication across the school community. She has streamlined approaches to sharing information with staff and parents. The agreed dates for information to be shared and the introduction of a weekly bulletin, is beginning to make information clearer for parents. While parents see some improvement, there is a need to ensure parents receive information that is clear, concise and gives them time to prepare for school events. Teachers now use a new online platform to share information with parents. As staff develop their use of the online platform, they need to ensure there is a more consistent approach to using the online platform across the school.

Overall, progress is beginning to be made in addressing this area for improvement. The local authority should continue to support the leadership team to improve strategic leadership across the school.

Senior leaders should establish robust approaches to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's work. There is a need for senior leaders to take greater managerial oversight of the nursery, primary stages and enhanced provision as a whole school community.

The leadership team have now established a clear calendar of activities to visit classrooms, sample children's work and check children's progress. They provide feedback to teachers about children's learning, engagement and the quality of children's written presentation. They

should build on this positive approach to give teachers clear next steps on how to improve the quality of teaching. Senior leaders should develop systems to use the information gathered to identify whole school areas for development. Teachers would now benefit from increased opportunities to visit other classes. This will help them to share ideas and good practice with each other.

The deputy headteacher has strengthened links between the nursery class and the school. This has led to significant improvements in children's experiences in P1. The senior early years practitioner and deputy headteacher have developed stronger approaches to checking the progress children make in the nursery. Although this is at the early stages, there are early signs of raising attainment in P1.

The team in the Support to Achieve Real Success (STARS) class has changed a few times in the last year. Staff have visited other specialist provisions within the local area. This is helping them to plan improvements. The headteacher and staff who support children who access the STARS class should continue to engage in professional learning to support further improvements in the enhanced provision.

Overall, progress is beginning to be made in addressing this area for improvement.

Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure all children receive a consistently high-quality learning experience across the school. This should include a whole school focus on assessment and achieving national standards. There is a need for a specific review of approaches to learning and teaching at early level.

Staff have engaged in a range of professional learning on effective questioning, providing feedback and the elements of a good lesson. Their application of this learning is beginning to improve learning and teaching. They need time to embed the new approaches and improve further the consistency across the school.

Most children engage well in their learning. In most lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. Most teachers use questioning well to check children's understanding. Staff have introduced a whole school focus on skills. Most children now benefit from an understanding of the skills they are developing across a range of activities. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is still too slow. As a result, a few children disengage from the activities. In a majority of classes, there remains a need to ensure children experience pace and challenge more closely matched to their needs.

Staff have worked well with local authority officers to review their approaches to play-based learning. They have made effective use of national guidance and visits to other settings, to improve their approaches. Children now experience a better balance of direct teaching and play across the day.

Senior leaders have reviewed the school's assessment calendar. Teachers use a broader range of summative assessments throughout the year. Most teachers give children helpful feedback on their learning. Children now need time to reflect on this feedback and apply it to future learning.

Overall, there has been positive progress made in addressing this area for improvement. As planned, staff should continue to develop their approaches to learning and teaching to build on this positive start.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress 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.

Marion Carlton
HM Inspector