

23 January 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2022, HM Inspectors published a letter on Slains School. 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.

The acting headteacher and staff should develop further their approaches to prioritising and directing improvements to ensure all children reach their full potential.

The school is making good progress in all areas identified in the original inspection. All in the school community have a shared sense of purpose and vision for continuous improvement. Led by the headteacher, approaches to directing improvements in learning, teaching and the curriculum are all leading to improved experiences for learners. Children's needs and interests are now better met. Children's progress and attainment have improved.

Approaches to strategic leadership of improvement have improved. Together, the headteacher and staff have accurately identified strengths and continued areas for improvement within the school. This is resulting in appropriate improvement priorities being identified and directed to support all children to fulfil their potential. The headteacher and staff visit other local schools, undertaking professional learning together, sharing practice and learning from each other. All children across the school are now involved in the 'pupil voice' group, sharing their views on school improvement. Children are confident in sharing views with school staff and with visitors. Members of the pupil voice group presented their views on their school improvement journey to the Parent Council. The headteacher and staff continue to promote strong partnerships with parents and community members across the school. They consult the Parent Council and parents about school improvements on a regular basis. As a result, parents are more positive about changes which have been made. As a next step, the headteacher and staff should prioritise key areas for improvement on a more focused basis. This should include more specific measures of impact on outcomes for children.

Improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This should include developing, as a staff, a shared understanding of how they plan learning that allows children to build on previous learning. In doing this, staff need to develop an understanding of national standards.

The staff team has worked well together to improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. They have developed manageable approaches to planning across the curriculum. This supports improved progression in the learning experiences offered to children. Staff now have a clearer understanding of national standards and are making more regular use of guidance, to plan children's learning more appropriately.

Relationships across the school remain very positive. The supportive culture promotes opportunities for improved discussion about learning. Children are clearer about the purpose of their learning and know what is required to achieve success. Teachers and support staff have worked together to improve the quality of feedback on learning. This well-judged feedback is helping children improve their learning. The headteacher and staff use a range of assessment tools to evaluate children's progress and plan next steps in literacy, numeracy and aspects of health and wellbeing. Staff should now consider how they use assessment more effectively in planning children's learning across other areas of the curriculum.

Staff have improved children's use of digital technology in learning and teaching. Children now have regular access to an individual tablet for use in school. Children are responsible for looking after their own tablet and ensure it is fully charged and ready for use. They are confident using digital applications to support learning. Children also have opportunities to use digital tools to research information and display their findings in presentations. Staff should ensure that the writing illustrated in these displays is of sufficiently high quality, in line with children's level of achievement and targets.

Across the school children have regular opportunities for play-based learning. Staff have engaged in professional learning, including visits to other schools, to extend their skills and knowledge in this area. This approach is at an early stage of development and implementation. Moving forward, led by the headteacher, staff should review the quality of the play opportunities to ensure children make progress in their learning. Too much time is offered for free play that is not connected to the key learning. Children would benefit from quality opportunities to practise and apply their literacy and numeracy skills during relevant and appropriately challenging play.

There is a need to better meet the learning needs of all children.

The headteacher and staff have improved approaches to meeting the needs of all children. Children with barriers to learning are now having their needs met better are now making appropriate progress in their individual learning targets. The headteacher and staff have put in place an updated system for referrals for children who may require additional support with their learning. Teachers and support staff plan and review strategies and learning activities to support individuals. Staff have undertaken professional learning, which is helping them to support individual learners. As a result, staff are now more knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities in meeting the differing needs of their children.

The headteacher and staff have continued to develop their whole school approach to supporting children's wellbeing. They ensure a strong focus on inclusion and wellbeing of all learners. Children report confidently how they feel respected, responsible and included, for example through the whole school 'pupil voice' group.

Across the school, support staff provide highly effective input, through skilful and sensitive support to individuals. The additional support for learning teacher continues to support individual learners and groups of children effectively. This includes through focusing on aspects of literacy such as phonics, reading and writing. Teachers now have regular discussions with children about their learning. Children discuss confidently what they have learned, including what skills they are developing. Together they discuss what children need to do next, setting targets in aspects of children's learning. As a next step, the headteacher and staff should refine their procedures for recording all the strategies they use to address

children's learning needs. This will support them to analyse each intervention and monitor resulting progress, for example to support key points of children's transition.

Improve children's progress and attainment across the curriculum, particularly in reading and writing.

Overall, as a result of the staff team's enhanced approaches to learning and teaching, children's attainment in reading and writing has improved. Most children are now making good progress from their prior learning in reading and writing. The staff team has embraced the need for change and improvement. They have worked well together to ensure children experience improved learning across reading and writing.

Children have access to a wide range of books and texts. This is supporting their motivation, confidence and progress in reading. Children working towards first level require reading activities to be set at the right level of difficulty to ensure they remain on track with their progress. Across the school, children now write more regularly in different genres. Children create texts for a range of purposes, using an increasing range of punctuation with accuracy. They would benefit from increased opportunities to write regularly at length. Staff should now ensure children have regular opportunities to demonstrate and apply their reading and writing skills across the curriculum.

Overall, the headteacher and staff team recognise the need to continue to embed and monitor approaches to ensure high standards of attainment and achievement for all learners.

Ensure all children have opportunities for learning across all areas of the curriculum.

The staff team has reviewed approaches to planning to ensure children experience a broad and balanced curriculum. Children experience literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing learning activities each week. Teachers also offer well planned activities to help children develop art and design skills. Children experience music in their curriculum, however, staff should ensure these experiences offer children progression and breadth in their learning. Children still require improved learning experiences within social subjects.

Staff are at the early stages of reviewing a curriculum rationale that reflects the unique setting and community of Slains School within coastal Aberdeenshire. As they continue to develop the curriculum, staff should ensure topics of learning that link different curricular areas together are relevant and motivating for children living in this environment. Parents are keen for their children to understand more about living in a diverse and multi-faith Scotland. They also welcome the opportunity to engage with children regularly about their own world of work and interests. Moving forward, the staff team should involve parents and children in planning and implementing the revised curriculum.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Aberdeenshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Sally Stewart
HM Inspector