

23 April 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In March 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Alva Primary School and Early Learning Centre (ELC). The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Clackmannanshire 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. 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.

Improve the strategic leadership and pace of change across the school, nursery and ASD provision. This should engage children, parents, partners and staff fully in school improvement and focus on securing better outcomes for all children.

The new headteacher is regarded highly by staff, children, parents and partners. She has worked tirelessly and has been instrumental in leading change and improvement, ably supported by the depute headteacher. There is now a more collaborative culture across the school community that is based on positive and trusting relationships.

Staff created a school improvement plan which addresses the areas for improvement identified in the original inspection. This plan focuses sharply on improving outcomes for children. The headteacher manages the pace of change well by ensuring that improvement planning provides staff with time to reflect, make adaptations and embed changes. As a result, children's levels of engagement, achievement, attendance and attainment are improving.

Across the school, staff now feel more valued and that their views are listened to. Staff within the school, the Ochil class (ASD provision) and ELC now meet together regularly to review the work of the school. Staff are now clear about the need and reasons for change which is helping them to have ownership of planned improvements.

Children enjoy and flourish in the responsibility of being members of a range of pupil leadership groups. These groups help children to realise that their views are important and acted on. As a next step, staff should continue to widen opportunities for children to lead and influence the life and work of the school.

The headteacher carried out a range of surveys and 'open door' sessions to gather the views of parents and children. Parents comment on the positive changes over the last session and now feel more welcome in the school. Staff should now build on these relationships to provide parents with more opportunities to be involved in their child's learning. As planned, senior leaders should take forward the 'school app' which will support parents to access school information from the one place.

All partners feel they are more involved in joint planning for the services they provide to the school. This more effective partnership working is impacting positively on children's engagement and attainment.

Over the last year the school has received a Language Communication Friendly School Award and a Sports Scotland Gold Award. Children and staff are very proud of these achievements. The school now has increased capacity for change and improvement. Senior leaders should continue to support the school community in its continuous improvement journey.

In the nursery, a number of recent improvements have been made to the learning environment. Senior leaders and practitioners now need to ensure these changes lead to high quality learning experiences for children.

Children experience familiar routines in a calm and nurturing space and as a result, develop strong bonds with practitioners. Practitioners work well as a team to make improvements to children's experiences. They think carefully about the resources on offer to make best use of the space and to increase the engagement of children. Most children engage for sustained periods of time in their play. Children navigate the spaces indoors and outdoors confidently and with purpose. They enjoy exploring loose parts and open-ended materials. These changes are having a positive impact on children at key transition points throughout the day.

Practitioners have developed a quality environment in the nursery which supports children well to use mathematical language in their play. Building on this positive work, they should make best use of the environment to further develop children's literacy skills. Practitioners should continue to review the experiences they provide to ensure children are challenged appropriately through their play. Practitioners should now develop partnerships with colleagues and settings beyond the ELC. This should help practitioners to develop further their understanding of planning high-quality learning experiences for children.

Develop a whole school positive relationships policy to create a nurturing climate for learning. This should ensure that all staff promote positive behaviour consistently across the school.

Senior leaders have worked successfully with staff and children to revisit the school values of 'safe, ready and respectful' and agree what this looks like in the ELC, school and Ochil classes.

Staff worked well to create a whole school relationships policy which outlines clearly their approaches to promoting positive behaviour. This policy provides staff with clear guidance on how to respond when children need support to regulate their emotions. Most children now feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they are upset. They engage more positively in learning and now enjoy their time at school. Most children feel respected and included by adults who support them. Staff volunteer as mentors to provide consistent support to children who benefit from one-to-one support from a trusted adult. As planned, all staff should continue to embed approaches to creating an inclusive, positive climate for learning.

Learning assistants now lead games and activities to promote positive play in the playground. Children act as 'playground reps' supporting their peers to play with others during breaktimes. The Parent Teacher Association has provided valuable support to improve

playground resources and games which is enhancing children's experiences and play. These approaches support children's positive relationships and responsible engagement in the playground very well.

Senior leaders reinforce positive behaviour during assemblies and staff refer to the school values regularly in lessons. Children now enjoy receiving awards and house points when they display the school values. Children particularly enjoy the treat of attending the 'Values at the View Café' where they receive a drink and snack whilst talking to children from other classes.

Ensure all children receive the right level of support and challenge to meet their learning needs.

Senior leaders provide highly-effective guidance to all staff in meeting children's learning needs. They plan regular professional learning very well to help staff understand how they can meet the wide range of needs across the school and ELC. Teachers undertook useful professional learning which is helping them to provide children with greater levels of support and challenge in their learning. Senior leaders and teachers now review the progress of all children every term.

Children who require more support or challenge now receive learning experiences that are more suited to their needs. Teachers worked together to adapt their 'Reading the Alva Way' guide, their teaching resources and how they plan children's learning. Teachers now plan children's learning that is set at different levels of difficulty. They outline explicitly the approaches they will use to challenge or support children. Senior leaders and staff should, as planned, continue to review these approaches. This will ensure children receive the right level of challenge in all areas of the curriculum.

Children who require additional support now have appropriate plans with measurable and achievable targets that link well to their identified needs. Senior leaders review children's targets regularly with teachers, families, partners and children. As a result, all children who require support make good progress against their own milestones. Staff in the Ochil classes have received professional learning which is helping them well to create more accurate personal targets for all children. Senior leaders have created a highly-effective 'Team around the School' where school staff and partners plan supports to better meet children's needs. As a result of this approach, the number of children receiving targeted support has increased. Staff in the 'The View' learning space provide highly-effective targeted support for children who require bespoke learning experiences.

Senior leaders and staff are building stronger links between home and school. They have been highly successful in improving attendance and the school now has one of the highest attendance rates in the local authority.

Continue to develop approaches to teaching, learning and assessment to increase the pace of learning and raise attainment for all children.

Teachers at the primary stages have made a number of important improvements to their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Children now learn in calm and purposeful learning spaces. Class teachers and learning assistants use praise warmly to encourage children in their learning.

The headteacher took prompt action to review approaches to learning and teaching. Teachers now use agreed planning formats in literacy and numeracy which are helping them to increase the pace of children's learning. In almost all classes, children now have opportunities to work in pairs, groups and as an individual on tasks. This is helping children to stay motivated in their learning. Teachers now set lessons which flow at a faster pace and ensure children spend more time on purposeful learning. They outline the purpose of learning with children and support them to understand what they need to do to be successful in their learning. All children across the school now learn within their own class rather than across a Curriculum for Excellence level. As a result of these approaches, a significant number of children achieved higher than expected levels of attainment last session.

Teachers have increased opportunities for children to use self and peer-assessment which helps children to better understand their strengths and next steps. They plan assessment tasks as an integral part of the planning of learning and teaching using a range of approaches. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop approaches to assessing children's progress.

Staff in the Ochil classes have reviewed approaches to planning learning to ensure children receive a broad curriculum. They recognise this is an area for ongoing improvement and should continue to work collaboratively to ensure children have learning experiences which are relevant to their needs.

In the ELC, practitioners now have clearer processes for planning learning which supports them well to consider how they can develop children's skills across the curriculum. They take full account of children's ages and stages of development as a key focus.

The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide additional staff who deliver highly effective support to children in literacy, numeracy, improving attendance and wellbeing. PEF is also used to support children in the Ochil Classes to develop their skills for learning life and work. These approaches are impacting positively on children's attainment, achievement, attendance and wellbeing.

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. Clackmannanshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Helen Mulholand
HM Inspector