

3 September 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Banff 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 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.

The headteacher should improve arrangements for leadership across the school and nursery. She should take a more strategic lead on how improvements are identified, implemented and monitored.

Due to a variety of circumstances outwith the control of the school the leadership team has not been able to make as much progress in this area as they would have liked. We ask the Education Authority to take steps to provide the headteacher with two permanent depute headteachers to support the work of the school. There is a need to ensure that the vacancies within the school are filled with staff who can support the improvement journey.

Improvements have been made to the planning and structure of the curriculum which is providing children with a broad range of experiences. Staff have improved how they track and monitor attainment which is resulting in improved attainment in a few classes. Children with additional support needs now have clearer targets set to help measure their progress. Steps have been taken to provide a few staff with professional learning to support the emotional and social needs of a few children across the school. We agreed with the headteacher's plan to develop this more fully over the next year to provide support for a few children who find being in class too challenging. This should help to address parental concerns about the impact of children's behaviour in a few classes.

A senior practitioner has been appointed to lead the nursery to support provision for increased hours across the year. Working with the headteacher, the senior practitioner has adapted the nursery to accommodate the additional hours and full time provision for a number of children. Together, they have made improvements to the structure of the nursery day to encourage quality play. Adaptations have been made to the layout of the nursery and to how practitioners interact with children to improve learning within the playroom.

Practitioners are extending the use of the e-portfolios to track children's progress and share learning with parents.

In order to raise attainment, building on best practice already in the school and the nursery, staff should develop consistency in approaches to learning and teaching.

There has been significant changes to staff since the original inspection. Instability in the leadership team and staffing within classes has prevented staff developing more consistency in learning and teaching across the school. Observations during inspection showed that there

remains good practice across the school that should be shared more widely. In the best examples, children are active and fully involved in their learning. They are given opportunities to talk about their learning and work at an appropriate pace while working in pairs of groups. However, in a few classes children's work is not of an appropriate level of challenge. The pace of learning is too slow and, as a result, a few children are becoming disengaged in their learning. A number of parents and children feel that a few children do not respect others well enough. We have asked the school to take steps to address these concerns as a matter of urgency. In addition, there is a need to strengthen the health and wellbeing programme. This should include a planned and progressive approach to developing their understanding of respecting others and keeping themselves safe.

Within the nursery, much work has been done to improve the environment for learning and the interactions between adults and children in their play. As a result, children sustain enjoyable play throughout the session, accessing resources freely to follow their interests. Practitioners are improving how they scaffold their learning through well-planned interventions in learning. They have continued to develop ways to help track children's learning and to share learning with parents. Practitioners are aware of the need to strengthen how they assess children's progress through the early level and plan for different learning needs within the playroom.

Staff should improve approaches to assessing, tracking and monitoring children's progress to support them in improving children's attainment in the school and nursery.

There are now much clearer arrangements in place to monitor the progress of children in their learning and staff are now more involved in monitoring attainment. Staff use a range of assessments to identify children's progress in learning. They meet with the leadership team regularly to identify interventions needed to improve children's attainment. However, in too many classes the information from assessments is not being used well enough to provide children with appropriate tasks and activities to ensure their attainment improves. There is a need to provide staff with further opportunities to work with other schools and with the National Benchmarks, to develop accuracy in their judgments on Curriculum for Excellence levels. Overall, there needs to be a clearer focus on how staff demonstrate they have raised attainment for all children, both within short-term and long-term interventions.

Across the primary and nursery classes, staff should improve the curriculum in line with national guidance.

Steps have been taken to increase the use of progression pathways in learning to improve how children build on their previous learning as they move through the school. These are not yet being used consistently across the school. The approach to interdisciplinary learning has been improved with the creation of a three-year overview to ensure a balance in experiences over time. Staff have identified ways in which they would like to improve this further. Instability within the senior leadership team since the original inspection has impacted on the school's ability to monitor and develop the curriculum. Variations in how curricular guidance is used is weakening provision across the school. Moving forward, it will be important to ensure the senior leadership team have clear remits which includes monitoring of provision across the school. Staff should take greater account of the feedback they receive from the leadership team to support improvements.

What happens next?

The school has made insufficient 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 six months 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.

Sadie Cushley
HM Inspector