

15 March 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families, have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class is located in a rural setting in Aberdeenshire. Throughout the pandemic, staff have ensured that there has been a clear focus on wellbeing, maintaining regular and supportive contact with children and families.

Almost all children coped well with the return to school after they spent time learning at home due to the pandemic. Most parents we spoke to, commented positively on the communication and support offered by the school throughout this time. Nursery practitioners provided effective communication and support to all parents, offering more help to children and their families if required. Parents welcomed the opportunity to engage in activities led by practitioners in the nursery class, including storytelling sessions. However, a few parents of children in the primary stages would welcome regular information about changes affecting their child's class.

Staff are taking positive steps to address the negative impact of the pandemic on children's progress in reading and writing. There is a clear focus on raising attainment for all children, with strategies in place to address gaps in learning. In addition, additional funding is supporting individual children and groups of learners at specific stages of the school.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The headteacher and staff have made positive progress in taking forward the areas for improvement highlighted at the original inspection. This includes, improvements to meeting children's learning needs, raising attainment and the promotion of more positive relationships. Senior staff and practitioners in the nursery class continue to drive forward significant and successful improvements. They work very well together as a team as they strive to provide the highest quality provision for children and families.

The headteacher has consulted with the whole-school community to agree the school's vision, 'Yes, we can'. Staff across the school are embedding the vision and values in all

aspects of school life. Children are able to talk about the values and what they mean for them and their peers. The headteacher is beginning to take positive steps to involve the whole community in influencing school improvement. Children participate in leadership groups to help improve aspects of the school's work. The pupil council is currently working together to improve the playground and increase the resources children can access outdoors. Staff are supporting the headteacher well to drive forward priorities for improvement. They are keen to lead and trial new initiatives.

Staff have introduced a number of successful new approaches to help create a more positive and calmer climate for learning. Children appear to be happier and more settled in classes, which is helping them to engage better in their learning. They are clearly enjoying and benefitting from more positive relationships with each other and staff. Children tell us they feel safe in school and are confident that staff will respond well to any concerns or worries they may have.

Overall, staff are providing effective support for children who may require additional help with their learning. Pupil support assistants make a positive contribution to the support individuals and groups of learners receive. This is one example of the wide range of help that children receive. It will be important, therefore, that staff track continuously the support offered to children to ensure that it is having the greatest impact to secure the best possible outcomes.

Practitioners in the nursery class continue to review and strengthen their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. A complete refurbishment of the indoor and outdoor spaces has supported the creation of an attractive and engaging nursery environment. Practitioners have developed further their observation skills and this is supporting them to identify clearly what children should learn next. As a result, children's individual needs are being addressed very well.

Across the school, children benefit from higher quality learning experiences. Staff are improving how they plan for and assess children's learning. They have higher expectations of what children are able to achieve. Children respond well to the opportunities they have to work in groups. Staff share with younger children how they can be successful using songs and rhymes. Children respond very well to this engaging approach.

Children experience greater breadth and depth in their learning through an improved curriculum. In addition, staff are taking positive steps to address any gaps children may have in their learning. However, in a few classes, there are still a significant number of children who could be making better progress in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher meets with staff termly to discuss each child's progress. We have asked that the headteacher and staff continue to track children's progress closely and to explore how best they can raise attainment and achievement for all.

In the nursery class, children continue to demonstrate their developing skills in early language and communication, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Each child has their own 'rocket target', which is set with support from practitioners. Children talk confidently about their targets and gain a sense of achievement as they add stickers to mark progress in their learning. There is scope to build on this positive practice across the school.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs some more time to embed new approaches that will support raising attainment. We have asked Aberdeenshire Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress within one year of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform, parents/carers. Otherwise, Aberdeenshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector