



From mountain to sea

Progress Report: Aberchirder Primary School (March 2023)

In January 2022, Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class received a follow up inspection. Education Scotland recognised the progress the school and nursery class had made taking forward the areas of improvement from the original inspection in session 2018/19.

Aberdeenshire Council have continued to work closely alongside the school over the last year to support further improvement. This report outlines the continued progress made by the school since the visit in each area identified for improvement.

School Context

Aberchirder Primary School and Nursery Class is located in a rural setting in Aberdeenshire. There are currently 5 classes across P1-7. Staffing and leadership is stable and consistent across the school. The majority of children live in SIMD decile 4 with some in decile 6. There is a high percentage of social housing in the area. The limited transport facilities and distances to the nearest towns and cities are also a factor in the experiences available to some of the pupils.

From mountain to sea

Recommendation: The Acting Head teacher should engage all members of the school community to fully develop the vision, values and aims for the school and early years setting. This should include clear agreement on children's rights and inform the rationale for the curriculum. She should develop a strategic plan to coordinate everyone to work together on the agreed priorities for improvement.

- There is a positive ethos within Aberchirder Primary School. The school has developed a clear vision with defined values and aims. The school continues to make good progress towards fully embedding the revised vision, values and aims. All staff regularly model and refer to these across the school setting. Almost all of children can confidently talk about the school values, what they look like and how they impact on behaviours and learning.
- Children are benefitting from the re-establishment of school "houses". These have been rebranded/refreshed and are being embedded in a collaborative way, led by the pupil council. Children talk enthusiastically about house activities which are strengthening their sense of identity and belonging to their school.
- All children benefit from leadership opportunities through participation in the re-implemented pupil voice groups for Health, Eco, Pupil Council and Rights Respecting. These provide opportunities that the pupils value to express their views and influence change across the school. The development of the playground area is a good example of this with pupils taking the lead by identifying the problems with it and planning ways to make the area more enjoyable for everyone to use safely.
- Children's rights underpin the work of the school contributing to a positive ethos. This is evident from the way links are made to the values, shape conversations and discussions and inform the curriculum rationale. Staff, pupils and parents were involved in the creation of the curriculum rationale and continue to develop this together. It reflects the uniqueness of the community as well as clearly identifying what learning and teaching should look like across all classes contributing to consistency of learning experiences.
- Senior leaders provide clear direction enabling the school to move forward on its improvement journey. All staff show a good understanding of the school context and there is improved understanding of the needs of children/ families and the progress children are making in their learning.
- Plans are underpinned by evidence and created through consultation with the school community. The school strikes a good balance between being outward looking while still focusing clearly on the local context. Senior leaders create time for staff to work together on aspects of improvement and a wide range of professional learning is planned to support priority areas for improvement.



From mountain to sea

- There is evidence of increased collaborative working within the staff team. Most staff take the lead on specific aspects of school improvement which is contributing to the pace of improvement and change. Good examples of this include nurture and literacy developments such as the new writing progressions being used by all teachers to support learning, teaching and assessment.
- There is a clear drive from senior leaders to engage in ongoing review and development of school priorities to enhance outcomes for the school community. Collegiate meetings and professional learning activities are planned which specifically link to improvement planning and next steps.

Teachers and Early Years Practitioners should review their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure that children make the best possible progress in their learning. They need to make effective use of an appropriate range of information about children's progress and work together, and with colleagues from other schools and settings, to develop confidence in evaluating children's success.

- Teachers continue to develop their approaches to learning teaching and assessment. They play an active role in ensuring clear curriculum progressions in all areas inform practice and ensure more consistent expectations of learners. These alongside progression frameworks support effective planning.
- Across all classes children benefit from improved, more consistent learning experiences through a shared understanding of effective practice and key features of learning, teaching and assessment. A next step is to ensure that the children are more aware of this and to involve them more widely in evaluating and planning their learning.
- Overall, the quality of learning and teaching across the school is improved. Classes are settled, learners are engaged and they enjoy opportunities to work in a variety of ways, using technology to support where appropriate at all stages.
- A clear, planned quality assurance calendar identifies opportunities to reflect on and evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment across the school. As a result of improved tracking conversations, almost all pupils experience appropriate levels of support and challenge. Teachers use a range of assessment information to support children's learning and are developing their approaches to improve how and what feedback is given to pupils about their learning and next steps.

From mountain to sea

- Professional learning, planned to support learning teaching and assessment, is impacting on the quality and consistency of learning and teaching across the school as well as enhancing the ability of all staff to meet learners needs and increase pupil engagement.
- Practitioners in the early years have adopted planning progressions and are beginning to use these whilst continuing to plan both for intended and responsive learning. Children in the early years access a wide range of opportunities for choice across the setting and develop as independent as learners.
- All staff regularly participate in professional learning and collegiate activities linked to the Aberdeenshire learning, teaching and assessment toolkit and engage in collaborative activities that enable them to share standards such as jotter monitoring, planning and moderation. This is strengthening their confidence in their judgements and enabling them to plan more effectively meet the needs of groups and individuals.

Across the school and early years setting, staff need to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to 'Getting it Right for Every Child' and these inform every aspect of their practice. Ensure a clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements for all children and ensure that they are supported to maximise their success and achievements. Children should have a clearer voice in helping to evaluate and plan approaches to improving their wellbeing.

- All staff understand and apply their statutory responsibilities in relation to child protection, safeguarding and meeting the additional support needs of learners. Across the school staff and practitioners are increasingly aware of their responsibilities in relation to 'Getting It Right for Every Child' and their role in promoting the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child.
- Primary School and early years staff work effectively with partner agencies and clear plans are in place to support those that have barriers to learning. Staff know the children and work together well ensuring that almost all children are fully supported in class. There is an inclusive culture across the school where trust is evident.
- Staff use consistent language and a range of strategies which promote positive relationships whilst supporting individual needs.
- Staff and children continue to develop a shared understanding of the importance of wellbeing. Early years and primary staff work collegiately to support this. The school are increasing the ways that wellbeing is promoted and supported. Pupils play a role in leading this through the Health Group and are taking the lead on initiatives including



From mountain to sea

extending early years SHANARRI mascots into the wider school. These are visible throughout the school and most pupils can talk about these and connect to how they are feeling. Zones of regulation are used well to support pupils recognise and manage their emotions.

- All children are developing their health and wellbeing skills well through a well-planned curriculum. One of the senior leaders has taken the lead in co-ordinating a cluster level Health and Wellbeing Group which has developed transition resources which support pupils to self-assess and set Health and Wellbeing targets. This is being used across the whole school.
- Staff have collegiately devised an approach to tracking and monitoring the health and wellbeing of all children. This enables resources to be allocated effectively and impact monitored. Pupil Equity Funding is being used to support targeted nurture sessions for children with different needs.
- Across the school and nursery, all staff regularly engage in relevant whole school and personal professional learning to further develop their knowledge and understanding of specific needs, allowing children to access appropriate support strategies tailored to their individual needs through individual plans.
- A recently launched School Hub is enhancing links with parents, the community and partner agencies through increased opportunities for all those who support the children to connect.

As a matter of priority, improve the attainment and achievement of all children in the school and early years setting. Teachers and practitioners should fully develop a detailed understanding of children's progress in learning through tracking and monitoring. Through this they should identify, and take action, to remove any barriers that children may have to their learning.

- Raising attainment in literacy and numeracy continues to be a key priority for school improvement. Clear literacy and numeracy progressions have been developed which are resource supported rather than resource led, enabling flexibility in learning and teaching and the ability to best meet learners needs.
- Writing is a particular focus for improvement. All teachers have undertaken "Talk for Writing" professional learning and it is being used consistently across the school as a resource to support learning and teaching. Engagement with writing is improved as is vocabulary and quality of outcomes at all stages. The newly implemented writing progression is resulting in consistency of expectations across different writing genres,



From mountain to sea

ensuring greater depth and breadth. Pupil support assistants are being used effectively to target reading and writing through specific interventions in class with children.

- Improved quality assurance processes ensure there is a focus on monitoring and evaluating learning and teaching. Focused learning visits take place regularly and planning is audited by senior leaders. Regular tracking and monitoring meetings take place. These are resulting in an improved understanding children's progress. The quality of evaluative vocabulary and discussion is improved, resulting in more specific, concrete next steps for learners. Conversations with the additional support needs teacher enable the impact of interventions with specific pupils to be monitored. Senior leaders meet with staff to identify and evaluate interventions to support children who are not achieving as expected.
- All teachers engage in moderation activities to support their professional judgement on achievement of a level. This largely happens at school level and the school are planning to undertake moderation activities with colleagues from other schools to further develop a shared understanding of progression within a level.
- Opportunities for wider achievement are provided for all children through Wider Achievement Groups (WAGs). These weekly skills-based sessions focus on developing transferable skills and extend opportunities for children to lead their learning through pupil voice groups and community linked activities work such as the gardening group who are responsible for the District Association planters.
- The school has made progress implementing increased use of appropriate, individual, target setting. This is particularly effective in the nursery class and is being developed throughout the school. All children set regular writing targets and most can talk about appropriate next steps. This continues to be an area for development.
- Pupil Equity Funding is strategically employed to support specific interventions with targeted pupils and groups of pupils including nurture and targeted literacy and numeracy interventions. The impact of these is reviewed through tracking and monitoring meetings.



From mountain to sea

Summary

Aberdeenshire Council is confident that Aberchirder Primary and Nursery Class will continue to build on the progress made over the last year to make positive progress and address improvement areas that were identified as part of inspection discussions.

Senior leaders have built good relationships amongst staff and the community and are leading change well. The improvement plan provides strategic direction to enhance wellbeing, learning, teaching and assessment for all children. Across the school there is a strong, collegiate focus on meeting the wide-ranging needs of all children and their families and improving educational outcomes for all children in an inclusive way. Teachers and support staff work effectively to lead learning, new initiatives and are keen to improve the school. All pupils and staff are proud of their school, welcoming to visitors and enjoy sharing their learning and successes with them.

Next steps

- Continue to improve attainment in relation to expected national standards, particularly in relation to writing.
- Continue to develop approaches to improve learning and teaching to ensure there is consistently high-quality practice across all classes.
- Continue to develop approaches to fully involve all children and the wider community in self-evaluation and school improvement and help them understand how their views improve the work of the school.