

18 January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) 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 Loirston 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 virtual meeting with the senior leadership team at Loirston School. 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

The headteacher was appointed to the school in September 2020. The school has also appointed a new deputy headteacher. The senior leadership team have subsequently reviewed their remits and these are now more closely aligned to school stages and areas for improvement. Since August 2021, the nursery offers 1140 hours through a 46 week model of delivery.

During periods of closure, the school ensured that all families had appropriate devices to enable children to access online learning. In light of an evident reduction in children's engagement, the school reviewed its approach to online learning. The creation of weekly online family learning was very positively received by parents. Parents reported this helped to reduce the pressure of supporting their child's online learning, leading to an increase in children's engagement.

Staff recognised that, as a consequence of the impact of the pandemic, some children presented as more worried and anxious than previously. Staff took the opportunity to review the school's vision, values and aims, to include a greater focus on relationships and children's wellbeing. Staff undertook professional learning to develop an improved understanding of the effects of trauma. This has resulted in an improvement in relationships across the school. Children are now kinder to each other and show greater empathy to their peers. Staff are now more skilled in dealing with situations when children experience difficulties. This is resulting in a more positive and caring ethos in the school.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Self-evaluation is now a key feature of the school's work. The headteacher and senior leadership team have established a quality assurance calendar. Staff use of the calendar supports them well to evaluate their work on a regular basis. A separate quality assurance calendar for the nursery supports the team well to monitor the impact of their work. Classroom observations, across the school and the nursery, help staff to monitor the quality

of learning and teaching. Improved professional dialogue is supporting staff to develop shared expectations of what good learning looks like. Peer observations of learning has supported staff to improve their practice in delivering learning online. Children now have increased opportunities to comment on, and influence improvements in, the school's work. Staff are now more aware of, and take account of, national guidance. This is supporting them to be aspirational in improving children's rights across the school. Parents are consulted well regarding how they can help improve the work of the school. The main focus of the work of the Parent Council is now school improvement. Staff make good use of digital platforms to ensure parents can contribute to school improvements. All staff have opportunities to take forward school improvements. Through membership on a range of groups they are taking forward improvements identified in the school improvement plan. Practitioners in the nursery are making significant improvements to the learning environment and in the learning experiences on offer. Engagement in professional learning is supporting staff to have a sound understanding of the nursery's strengths and areas for improvement. There is some evidence, despite the pandemic, of improvements at P1, P4 and P7 in literacy and numeracy. Staff have identified the need to improve consistency and confidence across the school in assessing achievement of a level. Staff plan to continue to develop further their moderation skills working with colleagues in another school.

The school has refreshed and revised the curriculum rationale, which now reflects better the school community and the its unique context. Staff have developed processes to plan, assess, track and monitor children's learning. Termly planning meetings with senior leaders support teachers well to discuss how children are progressing. The contexts for learning and capacities are now embedded in all planning of learning and teaching and children's learning is now more relevant and meaningful to them. The use of technology has been established in the nursery setting to support planning and assessment. Opportunities for learners to develop skills in using technology are being extended and children are increasingly able to use technology independently. Staff use of local authority and national advice supports them well to plan across all curricular areas.

The school has established an enhanced provision as a result of a significant increase in requests for support for individual children. The newly established support for learning team work in partnership with the senior leadership team to oversee and monitor a range of school-wide interventions for children who require additional support. Staff are developing their skills in identifying personalised targets for individual children. These are captured in individualised educational programmes, which are reviewed regularly in line with national expectations. Plans are in place to continue to develop teachers' confidence in developing individualised educational programmes and in ensuring that children and parents are part of this process. The school works well with partner agencies to ensure all children's needs are met well. Staff are developing the use of nurture spaces to help a few children to experience a more supportive start to the school day. This is helping these children to reduce their levels of anxiety and engage more meaningfully in their learning. The keyworker system established in the nursery supports staff well to have a clear overview of each child's progress. Termly meetings with staff ensure parents are fully involved in planning and agreeing each child's next steps. The additional support needs tracker, established in the nursery, supports staff well to monitor the effectiveness of interventions deployed to support children.

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 addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. Aberdeen City 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.

Graeme Gordon
HM Inspector