

25 January 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 Gracemount Primary School and Nursery Class, we said that we would engage further with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out virtual meetings with the school. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families have been supported through COVID-19. 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 officers, the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Progress with recommendations from the previous inspection

During the initial inspection of the school in June 2019, HM Inspectors highlighted aspects of attainment in literacy and numeracy as an area for improvement. Since the initial inspection, attainment in the majority of aspects of literacy and numeracy has improved across stages. These improvements have been supported and monitored well with regular input from local authority officers who continue to work with the school senior leadership team (SLT).

Dealing with the impact of COVID-19 has stalled the pace of a few of the school's plans to improve levels of attainment. Importantly, local authority officers continue to work closely with staff. This is helping to ensure that appropriate support is in place for the school to continue to improve. The SLT and local authority officers are confident that increased support for targeted groups of children from Primary 4 to Primary 7, will ensure gaps in learning are addressed at pace. Many of these gaps arose mainly as a result of challenges that year groups faced with home learning.

Overall, more focused collegiate working amongst teachers across the school and cluster is beginning to bring about improvements in attainment. This includes improved planning across stages to target key improvement priorities and better collaboration with the cluster secondary school to improve attainment in literacy.

Over the past two years, the SLT along with the support of the local authority, has made improvements in approaches to learning and teaching. This is helping to ensure children engage in more consistently high quality learning experiences. The SLT and teachers have successfully reviewed approaches to planning learning, teaching and assessment. This now takes better account of the learning needs of all children.

Staff across the school have worked well to design and embed a new learning and teaching policy that outlines key features of high quality learning and teaching for the school. To support this, staff have developed a helpful learning, teaching and assessment framework. This outlines common expectations and approaches all staff should take when

planning and assessing learning. Helpfully, this also provides clarity on the role that children's prior learning plays in the planning of new learning.

Teachers have developed stronger working relationships with staff in the associated secondary school to develop learning, teaching and assessment in numeracy. This has improved teacher confidence in numeracy learning and teaching. This is also having a positive impact on attainment. A numeracy school improvement group is continuing to work with the local authority numeracy specialist to develop improved progression pathways.

Teachers have engaged well with the 'Edinburgh Learns Benchmarks' training to improve their confidence in assessment judgements. Helpfully, staff now also involve children and parents/carers in setting targets in children's learning. They now engage in more regular dialogue with learners, including the use of termly conversations with children about their learning. They agree identified next steps that are then discussed during parent and carer dialogue meetings twice each session.

The SLT and teachers have been working closely with the Edinburgh Learns team. This is helping to engage staff better in using collaborative approaches to improve aspects of classroom practice. Commendably, this work has continued during the COVID-19 recovery phases. This is providing useful support to teachers around learner engagement. This collaborative work is also helping teachers to find ways of gathering regular, robust learner progress information in spite of challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Staff have made significant progress in embedding a tracking and monitoring system. This is helping teachers and SLT to track and monitor with more confidence, the attainment and progress of individuals and cohorts of learners. Importantly, termly attainment meetings, with structured themes for dialogue, focus on the progress of all children. This year, SLT and staff are developing a useful system to track learner participation and wider achievement. This will support children's equity in relation to their access and involvement in a range of activities. As planned, the LA, SLT and staff should continue to build teacher confidence and capacity to measure learner progress more effectively, over time.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are continuing to implement 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. The City of Edinburgh Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

JohnPaul Cassidy
HM Inspector