

1 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 Drumblade 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 Drumblade 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 acting 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**

Drumblade Primary School and Nursery Class is located in a rural location in Aberdeenshire. The rural nature of the school had the potential to impact negatively on learning and teaching. The whole school community worked together well to ensure children and families did not feel isolated. The strategic leadership of the acting headteacher supported the whole school team to develop and strengthen during COVID-19.

Prior to the first lockdown, the school had started to engage in digital learning and this supported children well as they transitioned to a period of remote learning. They accessed digital platforms to support their learning. Children also enjoyed opportunities for independent learning through home learning experiences. For example, children living on farms undertook regular activities such as caring for the sheep. Staff followed these activities up well by providing children with opportunities to write about and share their experiences.

The acting headteacher maintained a strong focus on wellbeing throughout the pandemic and this has supported children, staff and parents well. Staff ensured regular communication with children and families was a key feature of practice during lockdown. Parents told us how much they valued the way in which staff communicated with them during long periods of remote learning.

The Parent Council also played a key role during periods of remote learning. They provided different opportunities to support families and maintain strong connections through, for example, organising a family quiz.

### **Progress with recommendations from previous inspection**

Since the original inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership and staff in the school and nursery class. An acting headteacher took up post a few years ago. She also undertakes a part time teaching role in the school. A new leadership team has also been established in the nursery class.

The acting headteacher has helped to create a positive culture to promote a shared approach to school improvement across the whole school community. She has provided strong and supportive leadership to drive forward areas for improvement identified at the original inspection. She worked with stakeholders to review and refresh the school's vision and values. Staff are taking positive steps to embed the vision and values within the work of the school.

The acting headteacher has worked with children, staff and parents to improve the ethos within the school. She has taken very positive steps to raise staff morale and to strengthen relationships across the staff team. Staff across the school are leading school improvements such as developing outdoor areas in partnership with parents. They are benefitting significantly from planned, regular professional learning opportunities. Children also have a stronger role in influencing positive change within their school. One of the most notable areas of pupil leadership is the whole-school community newspaper, 'The Drumblade Rag', which children are producing and publishing each term. In the nursery class, the early years senior practitioner manages and leads confidently the nursery team and is very proud of the strong teamwork and commitment of all. Together with the early years lead practitioner, they have supported the staff team to make significant improvements in the nursery class.

Staff have taken positive steps to improve how children are supported as they move from one stage of learning to another. Practitioners support children well as they start in the nursery class. As children move onto P1, staff support them well to learn and thrive in a mixed-stage class and as a result, children at P1 are independent and motivated learners. All teaching staff now plan learning together which is helping them to support children better as they move through the school. The P7 to secondary school transition programme was not delivered as planned because of the challenges of the pandemic. Working closely with colleagues from the secondary school, staff made creative adaptations and employed different approaches to help children move successfully on to secondary school. Helpfully, staff surveyed former P7 pupils to help them identify ways to improve how they support children as they move on to S1. We have asked that the preparations for moving to S1 at secondary school remain an area of focus to ensure children make continuous progress in their learning.

Staff have worked together well to improve the curriculum. It now reflects well the unique context of the school. They take full advantage of the school's rural context to promote meaningful learning opportunities. For example, children have studied many aspects of farming. The whole-school community newspaper also reflects very well the local context. This is supporting children's understanding of their local area and the world of work in an interesting and relevant way. Staff have developed a variety of ways to ensure children enjoy greater breadth of learning. We have asked that staff continue to review how the curriculum is organised to ensure children build on their knowledge and skills as they move through the school. Children also have greater choice in the way that they learn. Staff are making the most of children's improving digital skills to support and extend their learning.

The acting headteacher and staff ensure children benefit from a supportive and inclusive ethos. They have taken positive steps to improve how they keep children safe. Staff are now implementing a health and wellbeing programme which is supporting children to learn in a clearer and progressive way. Relationships between children and staff are positive. Children report that they feel well cared for in the school. Older children take on responsibilities

willingly to support younger children in class and in the playground. There is a strong sense of family across the school.

The acting headteacher and staff are developing more robust approaches to assessing and tracking children's progress. This is helping to ensure children make appropriate progress and receive additional support if required. There is scope to increase children's understanding of their strengths and next steps in learning.

### 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. The acting headteacher and staff have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. Over the last few years Drumblade Primary School and Nursery Class has not had a permanently appointed headteacher. We have therefore 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 of its education service.

Jackie Maley  
HM Inspector