

7 December 2021

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 St Sylvester's nursery, we said that we would engage with the setting to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to St Sylvester's nursery. We discussed with the head of setting and local authority officer the setting'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

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.

The manager and practitioner in the nursery promptly put in place measures to deal with challenges arising from COVID-19. Parents commented that they were well supported by the nursery staff. During the lockdown periods, regular contact with families took place to offer support and advice. The provision of activity packs for all families helped the children continue to progress in their learning. Live online learning by practitioners was beneficial in supporting children's learning and keeping in contact with families. Parents welcomed staff reading interesting and relevant stories to their children and children cited this as a favourite activity. The nursery staff and parents reported that children settled back in the nursery very quickly after the closures. Children enjoyed playing with their friends again. In the first few weeks when the children returned to the nursery building, the focus was on health and wellbeing, which further supported the children back into the nursery environment.

During our visit, the children were happy and engaged well in all the learning activities. The manager and practitioners are closely following COVID-19 guidelines including returning children to their parents and carers outside the nursery. Practitioners have commented that this has led to improved communication as they have opportunity to chat to parents at these times. Since the re-opening of the nursery there have been very few incidents of practitioners and children having to isolate which has enabled practitioners to carry out activities to continually promote children's learning with little disruption. Practitioners have worked closely with their families to ensure children's individual needs are met and continue to support recovery.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

We discussed with the head of setting and local authority officer the setting's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

During the pandemic, the nursery has had a continued focus on taking forward improvements identified in the original inspection. Staff have reviewed the nursery's vision, values and aims in an inclusive way to fully engage children, parents/carers and partners. The importance of these in delivering high quality early learning and childcare is reinforced to all by their visual representation in the building, and the corresponding logo on the children's sweatshirts.

The manager and practitioners work closely with the local authority to develop a strong, confident culture of continuous improvement. This has resulted in improvements in the environment, planning and the quality of observing and tracking children's learning. As a result, staff are encouraging children to be more active in their learning. The manager continues to encourage practitioners to reflect on their practice at weekly self-evaluation meetings. Practitioners are encouraged to discuss what they do well, what they could do better and identify the next steps to improve children's learning experiences. As a result, staff are more reflective in their practice. Continued engagement with professional learning has supported practitioners to implement improvements in the nursery and become familiar with current thinking and research in early learning and childcare. The improvement plan includes relevant activities to improve the quality of learning experiences for children. The manager and practitioners should continue the close working relationship with the local authority to continue to drive improvements in the nursery.

The manager and practitioners continue to reflect on and refresh the indoor and outdoor environment to ensure they meet the needs of all children. Children enjoyed making soup in the outdoor kitchen and measuring each other on the walls. The manager and practitioner continue to review the needs of children under the age of three, making relevant and meaningful changes when required, particularly in the range of resources being used. Practitioners have worked hard to improve their observations of children's learning to assess children's progress and identify relevant next steps in learning. Practitioners plan for children's learning using a range of methods and use social media to share children's learning experiences with parents on a weekly basis. Practitioners should continue to engage children in planning their learning and developing their next steps.

Practitioners continue to engage with national guidance in order to develop a shared understanding of the curriculum. Approaches taken at staff meetings have been refreshed to ensure practitioners take a holistic view of the curriculum. This will support them to develop further children's learning and ensure consistently high quality learning experiences for all. Practitioners should continue to ensure they provide opportunities for challenge and depth in learning to support children's progress more effectively. Children have opportunities to undertake early leadership roles such as 'snack helper', however there remains room to expand on these leadership roles.

What happens next?

The setting has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have been implementing plans to support recovery. These have had a significant impact on the work of the nursery. Staff have also been addressing the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the setting in connection with the original inspection. Going forward, The Moray Council will continue to inform parents about the setting's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Dr Noreen Phillips
HM Inspector