

3 May 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 Towie Primary School and Nursery Class, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently held discussions with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to the 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

Staff and parents worked effectively in partnership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to help ensure that children were well supported in their wellbeing and their learning. Staff contacted families on a regular basis during periods of remote learning to enquire about their wellbeing and offer support as required.

The headteacher and teaching staff took account of feedback from parents and children in the primary stages when improving the structure and content of their remote learning activities. Children had access to daily live lessons in literacy and numeracy and additional resources that they could access independently. Parents appreciated that staff considered the individual circumstances of families and were flexible and supportive in their planning and delivery of learning activities. Staff also helped children to use online platforms and offered families access to practical resources, such as electronic equipment, books and stationery.

Children in the nursery class shared their learning via an online platform. Practitioners produced a range of supportive resources, such as story-telling videos and interactive presentations, to promote engagement and motivation. Parents welcomed the opportunity to be involved in their child's learning.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The staff, children and parents at Towie Primary School and Nursery Class are beginning to use evidence to identify improvement priorities and are now taking a more active role in leading improvement. Staff are reflecting on their practice more regularly. The headteacher encourages staff, parents and children to contribute to the school improvement process. Staff are participating in a range of well planned activities to gather information about what is working well and what needs to improve. They are beginning to use this information to inform plans for improvement.

Teachers are supporting improvement and increasing their skills and confidence through links with pupil leadership groups. They should now take an active role in leading improvements in key areas, such as curriculum development. Practitioners in the nursery

class are leading improvements in using play and the outdoor environment to support children's enjoyment and skill progression. Support staff play an important role in promoting the wellbeing of children and in supporting their learning. They are well placed to contribute more fully to leading improvements.

The majority of children take on class-based leadership responsibilities and a minority participate in whole-school leadership groups. These children are gaining important skills and are proud of their contribution to school improvement. Staff should now provide leadership opportunities for more children and support them to identify the skills and attributes they are developing as a result of their leadership roles.

Parents are positive about the opportunities they have to influence and lead improvement. They are proud of their involvement in refreshing the school's vision and values and in the development of the outdoor learning environment. The headteacher should now build on this positive start and involve parents in other aspects of school improvement.

The headteacher has introduced a new system to track and monitor the progress of individuals and groups of learners in literacy and numeracy. Teachers now need to be more fully involved in analysing this information to highlight areas of strength and identify development needs. The headteacher should continue with plans to track children's progress in all areas of the curriculum.

Teachers discuss attainment and progression at regular meetings with the headteacher. These conversations inform the planning of support for individuals and groups of children.

Children complete regular surveys about their health and wellbeing and these are supplemented with observations provided by staff. This approach is helping children to develop their understanding of the importance of wellbeing. Staff should now consider how to help younger children develop this further.

The headteacher tracks children's involvement in activities and clubs and uses this information to plan opportunities for all children to learn and achieve. As a next step, the headteacher and staff should track the skills that are being developed through participation in these activities and support children to recognise these skills.

Overall the school and nursery class are making good progress in improving children's experiences and in developing more consistent approaches to learning and teaching. Children and staff enjoy positive relationships across the nursery and primary stages. Children learn and play in a caring and calm environment where they are listened to and their views are respected. Almost all children engage well in their learning and play and are motivated to participate and respond.

Staff across the school have taken steps to better meet children's learning needs. Children engage in appropriate tasks and activities and use a range of resources. Teachers ensure that children have an element of choice within their learning activities. Books in the school and class libraries are helpfully labelled to guide children towards choosing texts that provide the correct level of challenge. The staff team are working well together to improve approaches to developing children's writing skills. We discussed with them the need to

ensure all children have more regular opportunities to write at length and improve the presentation of their work.

Approaches to planning in the nursery class are responsive to children's needs and interests. The practitioners know individual children very well, and plan carefully to support progress in learning and wellbeing. Staff at the primary stages now need to develop consistent approaches to planning, learning and assessment across all curriculum areas.

The nursery team enjoy working in the enhanced indoor and outdoor environment. The play resources and activities on offer in the free flow play room and outdoor areas provide the children with a broad range of learning experiences. Children also enjoy sharing stories, songs and ideas within groups. This supports well the development of their social skills.

Staff at the primary stages recognise that developing the curriculum continues to be an improvement priority. They understand the need for the school community to work together to develop a curriculum that reflects the unique setting of Towie in 21st Century Aberdeenshire and Scotland. The school setting in rural Aberdeenshire offers a rich context for learning and children across the nursery and primary stages enjoy playing and learning outdoors. To support curriculum development and improvement the school should revisit Curriculum for Excellence guidance and advice.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The newly appointed headteacher has a strategic and collegiate approach to leadership of change and improvement. Staff are supporting recovery and making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement and would benefit from continued support from the local authority. We have 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 then 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/carers about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

M. A. Speirs
HM Inspector