

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 Orchard Brae School, 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 Orchard Brae 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 have supported children, young people and their families well to deal with the impact of the pandemic. The recently appointed executive headteacher, together with the senior leadership team and staff have a good understanding of the individual needs of children and young people. They used this information well during the pandemic to provide a range of different approaches to engage pupils in learning and to allow them to feel part of the school community. Children and young people were provided with digital resources, learning packs and opportunities to participate in remote learning activities such as music, life skills and school assemblies. Specialist equipment such as postural management resources were made available to children and young people.

The school community worked together effectively to ensure children and young people were well supported to return to school in August 2021. Staff engaged well with partners such as the school nurse and physiotherapists to help ensure the safe return of learners. Helpful routines and protocols were established to support learners understand changes within the school such as the wearing of masks for staff, regular handwashing and physical distancing. As a result, almost all children and young people have settled well and are comfortable with the new routines. Access to digital learning continues for a few children who are as yet unable to attend school.

Parents are positive about how staff in the school have supported their children during the pandemic and on their return to school. Communication between parents and school staff is effective. Whilst parents are not yet able to attend the school in person, staff ensure that there are a range of approaches in place to share relevant information and that parents are able to attend virtual meetings. Parents are keen to be able to visit the school again and for learners' activities such as swimming to resume as soon as it is safe to do so.

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

From August 2021, senior leaders provided staff with a purposeful calendar of activities that is helping them understand how well the school supports children and young people learn. Senior leaders have actively sought out and participated in meaningful professional learning to build their own capacity in leading improvement across the school. This training enabled them to gather better useful information and data on children's progress and attainment. Senior leaders should now continue with their plans to use this newly gathered data to inform their judgements and decisions for future improvement planning.

The school has started to make progress in improving the quality of learning and teaching. In a few classes, there is appropriate focus on individualised activities that meet the needs of learners well. In these classes, children and young people demonstrate better levels of engagement. Staff need to continue to build on this good practice to improve learning activities across all classes. Staff have reviewed class timetables to maximise the time children and young people engage in planned learning. A more consistent approach to the start and end of the day is now supporting almost all children and young people to manage transitions better. Children in the nursery are happy and confident. High-quality interactions between children and staff remains a strength. Staff know children well and continue to respond sensitively to their needs. As planned, nursery staff should continue to increase the range of opportunities for children to engage in play alongside their peers.

Staff have made a positive start to the development of curriculum frameworks, however, the pandemic has impacted progress in taking forward this action. Senior leaders have established a curriculum leadership group. This group has developed a new framework for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This is supporting staff to plan learning that is more appropriate to the needs of learners. As this work continues, there should be greater opportunities for nursery staff to work in partnership with colleagues in the school. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on how the school was able to improve children's and young people's attainment. However, senior leaders have appropriate plans in place to improve learning and teaching and further develop the curriculum. They should monitor the impact of these priorities to ensure children and young people are attaining better.

Senior leaders have worked well with local authority colleagues to improve approaches to safeguarding and child protection. Senior leaders have transferred files and plans to a digital format and there is now safe storage of information. Staff have undertaken professional learning to improve their understanding of child protection concerns and reporting procedures. Positive relationships and effective communication with parents during the pandemic has led to increased sharing of important information about wellbeing between home and school. As a result, staff have an improved understanding about the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Children and young people now have more healthy food choices at snack times, such as fruit and water. A recently developed health and wellbeing curriculum is in place and at the early stages of being used across the school. As a result, children and young people are developing skills in areas such as personal routines, relationships, and physical activity. In the secondary and senior phase, this is leading to young people gaining accreditation.

## 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 also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked Aberdeen City 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, Aberdeen City 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.

Monica Reilly  
HM Inspector