

18 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 Rowantree Primary 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 Rowantree Primary 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**

Rowantree Primary School is responding well to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The headteacher and staff have been working well to connect with families, especially those reluctant to attend school. Staff contact families by telephone and make visits, when appropriate, to encourage better attendance. Children are well supported through the use of digital learning resources, particularly those who remain poor school attenders. Children all have access to laptops and good connectivity. The school provides other learning materials, distributing these to children's homes where necessary. The headteacher and staff also play a role in signposting how to access support for other challenges arising from COVID-19. Staff work well to cover for each other's absence and additional staffing, for class cover, is deployed well across the school. Staff and children maintain positive relationships and the high quality learning experiences which have been a consistent feature of the school improvement planning. Staff increased contact with parents has fostered a more positive climate and mutual understanding. Senior leaders, staff and parents have emerged from periods of remote learning with a deeper appreciation of their partnership. Senior leaders in school are now better placed to respond to the needs of the school community.

The headteacher and staff have adopted a very nurturing approach to welcoming children back to school. Staff support strongly the value of these approaches. They support equity and excellence in school and show understanding of children's individual needs. Children feel safe in their learning spaces and staff report an improvement in children's behaviour and attitude to school. 'Soft start' introductions are used to encourage children to come to school and the school bells have been muted to lessen anxiety. The headteacher and staff have a very strong focus on health and wellbeing and recognise this as a school priority. Children speak with confidence about the health and wellbeing programmes and are aware of their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Senior leaders have taken steps to support recovery. Partners are supporting the school well by providing motivating activity sessions to encourage improvements in children's

attendance. Teaching staff have established tuition classes for children who feel they may have missed important work through absence during periods of remote learning. Staff are aware of the individual needs of children and address these well through both universal and targeted support. Parents told us they now feel better informed about their children's learning through the use of the newsletter and digital media. These methods of communication share what children are learning weekly and welcome any questions. Teachers are approachable and keen to help parents support their children's progress

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

Senior leaders have developed a consistent and sustained approach to leadership at all levels. They have empowered staff to lead on identified key areas of curriculum. Curriculum leaders have taken responsibility for leading areas for improvement including literacy, writing, digital numeracy and play pedagogy in early years. Senior leaders now observe lessons regularly and share strengths and areas for improvement with staff. Staff participate in peer observations and feedback to colleagues on strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers have improved their teaching approaches significantly. They are increasing the pace of activities related to raising children's attainment. Children are now challenged at an appropriate level. Tasks are differentiated to take account of different levels of ability. As a result, there is an improving picture of raising attainment. This is supported well by improved pedagogy, the use of peer partner work and feedback through regular observations. There is now a more systematic approach to planning for improvements to help children to make the best possible progress.

The leadership team are now recording improved attainment data from across the school. They have gathered robust information on the progress of all children. Children are involved in planning their lessons. They are offered choices on topics and activities. Children discuss learning intentions with the teacher and each other and co-construct the success criteria for each learning experience. Children speak confidently about their learning and teachers use questions well to further children's understanding.

The headteacher and staff have robust and detailed tracking and monitoring systems in place to support children's learning and progress. There are clear processes in place which are understood and used well by teachers across the school to track and monitor children's progress. Information is shared digitally across the school and staff benefit from having access to one another's planning and assessment data. This data is discussed with staff at planned and regular consultation meetings and forms the basis for interventions made to support individual children's needs. Staff continue with their professional development work on moderation and assessment and are building expertise in their professional judgement and the assessment of a level. Staff have a clear understanding of how accurate assessment informs next steps in learning for children.

The headteacher and staff have well-developed systems in place for identifying and planning support for children with a wide range of additional support needs. Staff and partners respond promptly to the needs and circumstances of children with a range of needs. Staff offer differentiated activities and targeted support in class, nurture groups and clubs and activities, which encourage children to engage positively with school. Parents are now involved actively in supporting target-setting within individual learning plans and attend review meetings regularly. Staff are now well aware of legislation related to additional support needs. Staff

recognise that parents and staff would like more support staff in class to help children to overcome gaps in their learning as a result of COVID-19. Senior leaders are making significant progress. This includes children attending the enhanced provision classes and participating in activities with their peers. Vulnerable children receive well-targeted support which is helping them to develop their social skills and giving them the confidence to manage anxiety in situations they may find challenging. As a result, the school has a calm ethos and children feel safe and happy. Senior leaders are supporting teachers well to access professional learning online. Plans are in place to provide more specialist training for staff who support children with more complex needs.

The staff now make good use of local authority progression pathways in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. These pathways support the staff's strategic planning well. This includes the use of National Benchmarks to support staff when they are tracking learning achieved, assessing and reporting to parents. Staff are aware of the children's entitlements and a broad curriculum is planned to meet the needs of all children. Senior leaders consult with staff and plan learning well. The headteacher consults with all staff, children, parents and partners to plan a curriculum matching the unique context of their school community. The headteacher acknowledges that this is being hindered presently by COVID-19 restrictions on parental engagement. There are plans to consult with parents using digital systems. Literacy and numeracy programmes are now embedded in the planning, tracking, monitoring and assessment cycle.

### 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 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. Dundee 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.

James McCrory  
HM Inspector