

28 June 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 Port Erroll 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 Port Erroll. 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

The headteacher has been in post since February 2020. Her first engagement with the school staff, children and community was online during lockdown. She has quickly gained the trust and respect of staff, children and their families. Her energy and positive attitude to change and improvement has supported the school community to work together effectively during COVID-19 and address the areas for improvement identified in previous inspections.

During periods of remote learning, the school team agreed key principles for the children's entitlements to learning. This included access to resources and materials for learning, regular high quality live and recorded online learning, regular contact with staff and opportunities to engage with their peers. Central to all of this was a strong focus on wellbeing and safeguarding. This approach proved successful. As a result, children and their families enjoyed active participation in a range of activities and continued to make progress in their learning. The whole school commitment to ensuring learning continued has had a very positive impact on team building and relationships across the school community.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The school is making good progress in all areas identified in the previous inspection. During our visit the headteacher and her team provided details of the school's journey of improvement. It is clear that staff feel motivated in their work and have a shared sense of purpose and goals. This is evident in all aspects of the work of the school and nursery class. We are confident that the school is well placed to continue improving outcomes for all learners.

The headteacher has developed a range of robust systems to ensure a whole school approach to monitoring and evaluating its work. There is an overarching focus on relationships, learning and teaching, and professional development. This serves as a platform for effective whole school improvement. Throughout periods of remote learning and on return to school there has been a relentless focus on achieving shared expectations that

children experience high quality learning and teaching across the curriculum. There are now consistent approaches to monitoring and tracking children's learning and progress. The school team has not allowed the pandemic to slow the pace of improvement. The team is determined to do the best for the school community. Staff identified the need to improve children's progress in writing and numeracy and mathematics. They have taken steps to address gaps in children's learning and there are emerging signs of improved progress.

The new headteacher acted swiftly to ensure the school community engaged on improving children's experiences across the curriculum. Using remote engagement with children, staff and stakeholders, she took the opportunity to refresh the school values, vision and aims. This included agreeing shared expectations for all. Children can talk about what is expected of them in their learning, behaviour and relationships. The school team has also developed a better understanding of what they can offer learners that reflects the needs and interests of the school community in a coastal village in Aberdeenshire. Staff have developed a range of courses and programmes that offer children improved breadth, relevance and allow children to build on their prior learning more effectively. The school has a strong focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as a vehicle to link learning across the curriculum and support children to have access to knowledge and skills from the world of work. The school is developing links with a range of parents and employers in the local area to enhance the curriculum.

The nursery and school have also had a strong focus on improving the learning environment both indoors and outdoors. The spacious school building and grounds are used very well to enhance and support children's learning. A range of attractive learning and play areas motivate children across the nursery and school. Children in the nursery enjoy well established outdoor play areas and a wide choice of play opportunities indoors. Practitioners engage effectively to facilitate play and learning.

Led by the headteacher, a whole school approach to improving approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, learning and teaching and the curriculum is leading to improved experiences for learners. Children's needs and interests are now better met.

Staff now make more effective use of observation and assessment information to plan next steps for learners and inform deployment of additional support staff. This includes support for children whose families may face a range of socio-economic or wellbeing challenges. Plans are in place for individual children who need extra help with their learning and to ensure children access appropriate support and interventions. Children and their parents are now more involved in discussions around plans for learning and support.

All of the improvements highlighted in this report are at an early stage of implementation. The staff team recognises the need to continue to reflect on the progress and impact of new approaches to ensure the work of the school leads to improved attainment and outcomes for all learners.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had an impact on the work of the school but staff have not

allowed this to affect improvements across the school and nursery. 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. Aberdeenshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

Susan Duff
HM Inspector