

29 September 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Auchenblae School and Nursery Class
Aberdeenshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including improvements in planning to ensure children make suitable progress from nursery through to P1 and how well the school's curriculum is helping children to achieve. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Overall, the quality of children's learning is good. The school has a clear vision which is underpinned by eight aims and six values, clearly displayed throughout the school. Children understand that these values help to ensure they benefit from positive learning experiences in school. Across the nursery and primary stages, children are polite, confident and very welcoming. They all feel safe and well cared for. At all stages, children respond well to positive and caring relationships with staff. In the nursery classes, children have very good opportunities to take turns and to help each other. They explore and investigate confidently, for example in the well-developed nursery garden. Staff personalise learning opportunities through the use of floor books, encouraging children to express their interests which can then be used to provide play areas that stimulate their imagination. In the nursery classes, most children are motivated and actively engaged in their learning. We have asked staff to ensure that children always know what their learning targets are and how they can improve. In the nursery and at the primary stages children make strong contributions to school life and to the wider community. They enjoy numerous opportunities to participate in a wide range of clubs and activities. They are able to express their views and influence decision-making through a range of groups including the pupil council, eco school committee and rights respecting group. Children plan, organise and lead charity fund-raising events and coffee mornings. For example, over £500 was raised in a Book Café to enhance the range of books available as home readers and £355 was raised for Red Nose Day. Older children are developing their leadership skills through working as buddies for children in the nursery and P1. The school is aware it

now needs to track and monitor children's participation and achievements to ensure that no child is at risk of missing out, and has clear plans for doing so.

Across the nursery and primary stages, most children make good progress in literacy and numeracy. In the nursery, children are articulate and express their ideas with confidence. They use story books independently and many enjoy using non-fiction texts to find out about things which interest them. Almost all children can recognise their name, and those of their friends, in print. Most can name and create simple two-dimensional shapes, and read numbers to 20 and beyond. At the primary stages, senior managers have begun to track children's progress in reading, writing and mathematics more closely to ensure they attain as highly as possible. Teachers have improved the programme for writing and this has helped to ensure that children develop their skills in a wider range of genres including poetry, letters and play scripts. Children are highly motivated by the increased choices in reading at home and school, and can talk confidently about favourite books and authors. However, they now need more opportunities in class to develop their skills in talking and listening. Children are developing skills and knowledge in mathematics and numeracy and making good progress in their learning. The school has focused on improving children's skills in mental calculations through the introduction of a new teaching programme. Across the nursery and primary stages, children are motivated by practical approaches to learning such as imaginative play in the mud kitchen and growing potatoes in the garden. Across the nursery and primary stages, children are learning about how to be healthy and keep safe. They understand the benefits of healthy eating and enjoy opportunities to be active outdoors. They have termly health and wellbeing targets in their Learning Journey folders, which are shared and discussed with parents.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

The school provides good support for children to develop and learn. Teachers have a clear and shared understanding of what they want children to achieve through the curriculum they provide. In the nursery, the curriculum provides children with a broad range of quality learning experiences which promote enjoyment and are increasingly built on children's interests. Nursery staff carefully track children's learning experiences to make sure that their curriculum is broad and balanced. Teachers are skilled at using local community resources, such as The Den, to support children's learning. Staff are also successfully encouraging parents and local groups, such as the Friendship Group, to get involved with the school to enhance the curriculum for children. Across the school, children are benefiting from access to the local environment, such as the beach, to broaden their learning experiences. The school is aware that there is scope to make even better use of outdoor learning.

Interdisciplinary learning opportunities are increasingly based on the interests of children and often innovative. For example, the project about the history of cinema is culminating in the production of fourteen animated and live action films that will be screened at an 'Oscars' night in the school. We have asked teachers to ensure that these interdisciplinary learning opportunities ensure children at all stages are making suitable progress. There is a very good transition from nursery into primary, including regular shared play arrangements for children with their new P1 teacher who makes frequent visits to see them. Teachers track children's progress effectively and this supports them when they move from nursery into P1. We have asked the school to

work with Mearns Academy to introduce similar approaches when children move from P7 into S1.

Staff in the nursery ensure that parents are informed about their child's learning by sending them email updates and using the 'All About Me' books which go between home and school. Staff take account of the individual needs of children when organising tasks, activities and resources for them. They also take children's individual interests into account and this is keeping them engaged in activities. They now need to make sure that next steps in learning are identified for all children so that adults can support them to make progress. Across primary classes, teachers use a variety of approaches to help support individual children. In most lessons, activities are well matched to children's needs and provide an appropriate level of challenge. However, in some lessons, the activities and learning targets are identical for all children, so that those who could potentially achieve more do not have the opportunity to do so. Across the school, teachers do not plan to meet children's needs effectively enough. Support staff provide good support for children in their classes and in small groups, including those with more complex needs. The school also has effective partnerships with other agencies, including speech and language therapy, to support children's learning.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The school has made good progress in improving the quality of its work. In the nursery, staff regularly evaluate their work informally through daily discussion, and more formally using self-evaluation approaches to measure their service against national expectations. They are discussing approaches with the local early years network so that they can continue to improve outcomes for children. They should however involve children more in evaluating and improving the nursery. Across the nursery and primary stages, staff have been encouraged and enabled by senior managers to evaluate their teaching practice and look at ways to improve it. The headteacher has been involving all staff, children and their parents in identifying of improvement priorities for the school. The school's improvement priorities for the past year have mostly been achieved, including the successful implementation of a new mathematics programme, improved approaches to self-evaluation and the development of systems to track and monitor children's progress. The school is aware that it now needs to involve other partners in the evaluation of its work so that their contribution to children's learning is properly planned.

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the school nursery had no requirements and two recommendations. These two recommendations have been met. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and one recommendation. Details can be found at the link below.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Well-motivated, polite, enthusiastic and welcoming children.
- Improvements led by the headteacher resulting in extremely positive partnerships with parents and the local community.
- High-quality transition process between nursery class and primary which ensures children can build on their learning when they enter P1.

- Impressive and accessible environment for learning within the school grounds and the wider community.

We discussed with staff and Aberdeenshire Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Ensure that children in the nursery and at the primary stages are challenged to attain as highly as possible.
- Involve partners in planning and evaluating the work of the school to improve children's learning.
- Work with Mearns Academy and Aberdeenshire Council colleagues to improve how children can build on their learning when they move from primary to secondary school.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Aberdeenshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Ken McAra
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/AuchenblaeSchoolAberdeenshire.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the publication *How good is our school?*¹. Quality indicators for the nursery class can be found in the publication *Child at the Centre*². Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

The Care Inspectorate publishes quality grades to inform people and the Scottish Government about the quality of care services. Awarding grades at inspections is aimed at encouraging providers to identify and address areas for improvement. The Care Inspectorate also uses the grades to ensure its inspection activity is targeted and proportionate. The grades at inspection are awarded against four quality themes, details of which can be found on the Care Inspectorate website.

Here are Education Scotland's evaluations for Auchenblae School.

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|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Improvements in performance | good |
| Learners' experiences | good |
| Meeting learning needs | good |

Nursery class

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Improvements in performance | very good |
| Children's experiences | very good |
| Meeting learning needs | good |

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school and nursery class.

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|--|-------------|
| The curriculum | good |
| Improvement through self-evaluation | good |

Here are the Care Inspectorate's gradings for the nursery class.

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|---|------------------|
| Quality of care and support | good |
| Quality of environment | very good |
| Quality of staffing | very good |
| Quality of management and leadership | good |

¹ *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence: part 3*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HowgoodisourschoolJtEpart3_tcm4-684258.pdf

² *The Child at the Centre (2), Self-Evaluation in the early years*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/catcseey_tcm4-712692.pdf

Please note that the term "adequate" in these documents has been replaced with "satisfactory".

Nursery class

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the school nursery had no requirements and two recommendations. From these, two recommendations have been met. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and one recommendation.

Recommendations

- The head teacher and staff should ensure that children's next steps in learning are identified and used to plan activities that support children to achieve their full potential.

A notification from the Care Inspectorate will be sent to the Provider to complete an action plan to address the Requirements and Recommendations made as a result of this inspection.

A copy of the full letter is available on the Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate websites at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/AuchenblaeSchoolAberdeenshire.asp> and
http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7644&Itemid=489