

27 August 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Craigievar Primary School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Aberdeenshire Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff about the steps the school has taken to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection. As a result, we were able to find out about the progress the school has made and how well this is supporting children's learning and achievements. This letter sets out what we found.

Develop approaches to plan and assess children's learning. Developing more robust ways of monitoring and tracking children's progress is also required. This includes the need to review the school's arrangements for meeting the needs of children requiring additional support.

Since the original inspection, the headteacher has driven forward improvements in a planned and measured way. He has provided strong leadership and direction to bring about necessary improvements within the school. Leadership of change has been brisk and has involved the whole school community. Children, staff, and parents clearly articulate the school's learning journey and the impact of new developments and initiatives. The headteacher and staff have made considerable improvements to a significant number of areas which were identified at the original inspection. As a result, children are making better progress across their learning and benefiting from a more appropriate learning environment. Staff recognise that there remains work to be done and time is needed to fully embed new developments.

Staff have involved children in influencing positive change to the learning environments. Staff have carefully organised and established new learning areas in their classrooms to engage their learners more effectively. At the early stages, staff have undertaken visits to other schools within and outwith the authority to support the development of play. Staff have set up a range of contexts to encourage more play-based learning opportunities. Across the school, children demonstrate a greater engagement with their learning. Relationships between children are now more positive. This has been achieved in different ways including the well-considered promotion of school values and the more consistent approaches to behaviour management. We have asked that staff continue to explore and develop ways to support a few children to complete all set tasks appropriately.

Staff have developed new approaches to planning aspects of children's learning. New planning formats have been introduced for literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and interdisciplinary learning (IDL). This is helping staff ensure that children benefit from a progressive learning journey as they move through Curriculum for Excellence levels. Approaches to assessment continue to develop. Staff are becoming more confident in the use of a wider range of assessment information and the use of National Benchmarks. This is enabling staff to have a clearer understanding of national standards. This, in turn, has raised staff expectations of learners in Craigievar Primary School.

The headteacher has looked outwards to help to identify a new approach for monitoring and tracking learners' progress. As a result, he has introduced a more robust way of capturing key information about children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing over time. Children now benefit from stronger support and challenge in their learning. It will be important to build on this as teachers develop further their approaches to assessment.

Since the original inspection, the headteacher has taken prompt action to review and improve the way children who may experience barriers to learning are supported. There is now a comprehensive overview in place detailing the different interventions, which are supporting children. Staff work well with external partners to support individuals and groups of children in the school.

Improve attainment in literacy and numeracy for all children as a priority.

The school has made positive progress in addressing this area for improvement. This has been taken forward in a range of ways. This includes professional learning for staff, developing new approaches to planning, learning and teaching and purchasing new resources. The headteacher has also introduced robust approaches for monitoring and tracking children's progress. Staff have undertaken a significant amount of professional reading and research to inform how they teach aspects of literacy and numeracy.

All staff have attended local authority professional learning on approaches to teaching mathematics. Staff report that this is enabling children to have a greater understanding of their strengths and next steps in numeracy and mathematics. Children also shared with the inspection team that they prefer learning in this way. Older children regularly apply their skills to solve contextualised maths problems. For example, children had to plan a holiday in Arran.

New approaches to teaching reading have been introduced across the school. At the upper stages, children engage in reciprocal reading groups, which are having a positive impact. Children value the opportunities they have to work with their peers in this way. Across the school, there is a greater focus on making use of non-fiction texts. Children now have more planned opportunities to read for pleasure. Commendably, children are proactive in promoting this and older children help to run the school library club.

There are early indications that children's progress in writing is improving. They now write for a broader range of purposes and have good opportunities for application of their skills within their IDL topics. Meaningful contexts such as the master classes and school newspaper, 'Craigie Crow' are enabling children to develop and apply a wide range of literacy skills. This includes, writing their own articles, creating, and asking questions when interviewing people for their 'spotlight on' features. We have asked that staff maintain a sharp focus on implementing a strong strategy for raising attainment for all.

Develop a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation and school improvement. As planned, involve children, parents and staff more meaningfully in these processes.

The headteacher has taken very positive steps in taking forward this area for improvement. All children, parents, staff and members of the school community were consulted regarding the renewal of the schools vision, values and aims. This has resulted in a vision for the school which the community recognises and which reflect Curriculum for Excellence in the

local context. This piece of work was central and critical to developing a unique identity for the school. This now shapes the curriculum, policy developments and will help focus priorities for improvement.

The headteacher has developed a very clear action plan linked to the inspection report, which has been regularly monitored and reviewed. As a result, children, parents and staff have a clearer understanding of the strengths of the school and priorities for improvement. All staff are now actively engaged in planning for improvement priorities, taking them forward and evaluating the impact of them. It will be important to keep all new developments and initiatives under close review.

Positively, the headteacher has collaborated with the Parent Council to take forward school improvement. The Parent Council continues to provide valuable support to the school. Parents are consulted regarding school improvement priorities and are kept informed of the progress the school is making in various ways. This includes through regular meetings of the Parent Council and through school newsletters and events. There is a strong feeling that 'this is the children's school'. Parents told us that they are very satisfied with the way the new headteacher has led improvements since his appointment seventeen months ago.

Develop the curriculum to ensure children build on their knowledge and skills as they move through the school.

Staff, parents, children and members of the local community have together, developed a curriculum rationale, which is underpinned by the recently established vision, values and aims. It reflects the aspirations for all children at Craigievar Primary School and encompasses all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

Across the school, progression pathways are in place for literacy and numeracy. These are supporting teachers to identify where children are in their learning and their next steps. There is now a need to ensure that effective progression pathways are in place for all curricular areas.

Teachers have reviewed the health and wellbeing programme to ensure that children now have an understanding of all areas of wellbeing. Commendably, children are encouraged to evaluate themselves against each wellbeing indicator bi-annually. As a result of feedback from children, staff have invested in resources to support developing their emotional literacy. This is a foundation for exploring and further developing children's resilience.

The school makes good use of the talents and skills of members of the local community to ensure children experience a curriculum, which is relevant to them. For example, participation in local and regional events such as the Greenpower Goblin STEM challenge, orienteering festivals, Scottish music and dancing events and WW1 Remembrance events. Children also benefit from support from National Trust for Scotland staff in developing the Craigievar Kitchen Gardens, delivery of Forest schools and outdoor learning opportunities. All of this is enabling children to apply their developing skills and knowledge in a range of contexts. Recently, there has been a focus on all stakeholders working together to plan future developments for outdoor learning to include a kitchen and a wildlife garden.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Aberdeenshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector