

13 January 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Ninian's Primary School and Nursery Class
Dumfries and Galloway Council**

In December 2013, HM Inspectors published a letter on your child's school. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. The school has a new headteacher who has been in post for a few months. There is also a new principal teacher. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We heard from the headteacher and other staff how the school has continued to improve. We looked at particular areas that had been identified in the original inspection and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the headteacher. As a result, we were able to find out how well children are now learning and achieving and how the school is continuing to support them to do their best. This letter sets out what we found.

How well do children learn and achieve?

We found that your children have a positive sense of wellbeing in school and are happy with the improvements that are being made across their school. At the nursery and primary stages, children want to do their best. They behave very well and are motivated to learn in class. In the nursery, children now spend longer on their chosen activity. They play well together and talk more with staff about their learning. We have asked staff to improve further how they involve children in planning learning activities and how they reflect on these together through their individual profiles. At the primary stages, children explained to us how their teachers now share the purposes of lessons and what they need to do to be successful. This is helping children to take more responsibility for their learning. We found that most children now know their individual targets for improving their own learning. We have asked the school to continue to build on these improvements, ensuring consistency and sharing good practice within the school.

Children's achievements are now recognised and valued much more by the school. Changes to the structure of the four houses and ensuring children have an increasingly significant and important part to play in school life are helping children to work within different teams, consult with each other and share their successes. In the nursery, children are making appropriate progress in early language and mathematics. At the primary stages children's progress is still too variable. Improvement is being seen at the early stages and staff feel changes to more active learning and teaching approaches have had a positive effect. Staff have worked hard to improve the teaching of reading across the school and there are signs that

this is working well. Children's progress in writing continues to need robust monitoring to ensure they build on their skills at every stage. We found that children are making better progress in numeracy and mathematics. Staff have consulted with each other and have agreed how to teach skills and ensure consistency. Children told us that they now have strategies to do mental calculations confidently.

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

We found that the ethos of the school has improved. A more nurturing approach, led by the headteacher, is enabling children to talk more about their progress and wellbeing. Across the school and nursery, staff expectations of what children can learn and achieve have been raised. This is helping staff improve the pace of learning and ensure children complete their tasks. The headteacher has rightly identified that expectations can be raised further and she is working closely with teachers to support them in setting high quality tasks and activities at the right level of challenge for all children. Children who need extra help in their learning are benefiting from the more flexible and very well-planned approaches by learning support teachers and assistants.

The curriculum across the nursery and primary stages is improving. Teachers and staff are more confident in using national guidance for Curriculum for Excellence. They have worked well together to plan what children need to learn and how they are expected to progress their skills as they move through the school. In the nursery, staff have created more attractive areas for learning which offer greater choice. We have asked staff to make better use of the stimulating outdoor area throughout the session. At the primary stages, the curriculum is more relevant and children enjoy their lessons. Staff have worked well to promote health and wellbeing across the school. All children are now learning French and they are excited to do so. Skills for learning, life and work are now being developed through, for example children learning about budgeting and taking on responsibilities within the classroom and school. The headteacher is very clear about the extent to which progress has been made in improving the curriculum. She has plans in place to look more closely at the design of the curriculum and develop consistent and effective approaches to assessing children's learning across the nursery and school.

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

The headteacher is making a very positive difference to the school. In a few months, she has established a clear picture of what is working well and what needs to be much better. She values the continuing support of staff from Dumfries and Galloway Council. Work done with you to develop a new vision, values and aims has been very helpful in creating clarity and a shared sense of purpose. Children told us that they are now much clearer about what is expected of them in school. The headteacher works closely with her principal teachers in improving learning and teaching across the school. This management team is working very well for your children. It is bringing about better learning and greater consistency across the classes. Teachers are working hard to bring about change. They are improving their approaches to self-evaluation and are now sharing their practice with each other. The systematic tracking of children's progress is underway. We have asked

the school to continue to use self-evaluation with children, parents and staff to work toward the goals that have been set within the new shared vision.

What happens next?

The school has made progress in taking forward the identified areas for improvement. Across the nursery and primary stages learning is better. The headteacher has been in post for a short time and therefore more time is needed to ensure the pace of improvement is maintained. Self-evaluation to improve teaching and work to take the curriculum forward is on-going.

As a result, our Area Lead Officer will work with Dumfries and Galloway Council to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out another further inspection within one year of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the school has improved.

Shona ES Taylor
HM Inspector

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.

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