

22 January 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Hythehill Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Moray 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. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Senior leaders should give clearer leadership and direction to the school, including how staff improve the work of the school.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have worked closely with the local authority to improve the leadership and work of the school since the last inspection. Despite significant changes to staffing within the school, the headteacher has worked hard to bring about improvement, ensuring the involvement of all staff. As a result, staff are more confident about initiating and leading change. Moving forward, senior leaders should continue to develop and support leadership at all levels.

The school's vision and values have been refreshed, fully involving parents, children and staff. There is now a shared understanding of how these are being used across the school and nursery to inform school improvement. The strategic planning for change is clearly linked to the priorities set out as a result of the last inspection. The senior leadership team and local authority have monitored the progress towards meeting the priorities regularly. This is providing a clearer understanding of the school and nursery's strengths and areas that require further development. Within the school, more accurate information about children's attainment is beginning to be provided following the introduction of a new tracking system. Staff confidence in using this information to inform their planning for improvement is beginning to increase. A more focused approach to evaluating the work of the school will provide senior leaders and staff with a more robust overview of children's progress and attainment.

In the nursery, practitioners are making increased use of national guidance to evaluate their work. Building on this positive start, we have asked practitioners to use the information gathered through self-evaluation to measure improvement more effectively.

Continue to develop a positive school community, built on a culture of mutual respect and effective teamwork.

Staff report a significant change within the culture and ethos across the school. Almost all feel valued and treated with respect. Across the school, staff feel their views are listened to and acted upon and there is an increased sense of teamwork. There has been an increase in

collaborative working across primary classes. Staff welcome these opportunities for professional dialogue and feel that this is informing their practice. There is scope for staff working across early level to work more closely together to ensure children make sustained progress in their learning.

Opportunities for pupil voice have increased. Children have welcomed the opportunity to select their own house captain and vice-captains, and choose which pupil voice group they would like to join. Children are ready and able to take increasing ownership of these opportunities and make a greater contribution to the school community and school improvement.

Develop high quality learning, teaching and assessment approaches, informed by current educational thinking, to ensure children are engaged in appropriately motivating and challenging learning experiences.

The school has made progress in improving the quality of learning, teaching and assessment approaches. With clear leadership from the headteacher, staff have been encouraged to reflect more on the quality of their practice in teaching and assessment. The headteacher has created more opportunities for teachers to talk together about learning and teaching. Overall, teachers recognise and value the time for this professional dialogue. As a result, this is beginning to bring about improvements and more consistency in elements of practice. Within the nursery, practitioners have reviewed the daily routine to provide more time and space for children to move freely between indoors and outdoors. As a result of this, children are independent and confident to make decisions about their play. Significant improvements to the learning environment are resulting in children having access to a wider range of natural materials and everyday objects. This is improving children's early literacy and numeracy, problem-solving skills and imaginary play. Practitioners should continue to increase the level of challenge provided to deepen their learning.

In primary classes, most children engage well in lessons and are keen to do well. Teachers regularly link children's learning to real life, for example in numeracy lessons. This is helping children to develop a sense of learning for life and work.

With valuable support from the local authority, the headteacher has supported staff to begin to develop a more systematic approach to assessing children's progress. Staff have implemented a new system to track children's progress in learning. Working in partnership with colleagues from other schools, teachers are gaining confidence in making more accurate judgements of children's attainment. Teachers should continue to engage in discussions around effective learning and teaching to develop further their practice. In particular, teachers need to ensure that lessons are appropriately challenging across all stages in order to support all children to make the best possible progress in their learning. Overall, tasks and activities are not yet consistently providing the correct level of challenge and support for each individual child. Children are at the early stages of knowing themselves as learners. There remains work to be undertaken in providing children with more consistently effective feedback on their learning. Children are beginning to become more involved in setting and reviewing personal learning targets.

In the nursery, limited progress has been made in relation to observing and recording children's significant learning. As a result, there is little evidence to demonstrate the progress

children are making and what they might learn next. The school has correctly identified the need to support practitioners to develop their skills.

**Improve the planning, tracking and monitoring of children's work across the school and nursery to ensure that children's work helps them improve their attainment.
Raise attainment across the school.**

Teachers are developing their skills in using a range of assessment information to inform their judgements of children's attainment. Whilst teachers are beginning to make more accurate judgements on attainment levels for individual children, school leaders have identified the need to underpin these judgements with robust, ongoing assessment of children's learning. More carefully differentiated tasks and activities within lessons will help children of all abilities to make better progress.

Literacy has been a focus for improvement in the last year, and there are signs from the school's own data, that attainment in this area is improving. Staff value the new approaches to teaching literacy that are being shared across the northern partnership of local authorities.

The school has correctly identified that children's attainment in numeracy and mathematics needs to improve significantly. Staff have made a positive start to improving approaches to mental mathematics. Children at all stages of the school now benefit from a daily programme of active activities and games to reinforce and improve their mental agility. More purposeful conversations with children about their learning, and how well they are making progress towards individual targets, is required.

In the nursery, the depute headteacher and practitioners have refreshed the planning process and, as a result, children are offered a wider range of curriculum experiences. Although practitioners have received training in relation to the use of floor books, limited progress has been made in their use. Currently, these do not demonstrate the depth of children's learning. We discussed with practitioners ways to develop this to involve children more fully in the planning process. Effective planning for children in the nursery who require additional support with their learning has now been established. Practitioners have made some use of progression frameworks to identify when children achieve a skill. However, these are not completed consistently and do not demonstrate the progress children have made over time. Recently updated progression frameworks and trackers have been created and will be implemented in the near future.

Implement the requirements, recommendations and areas for development as identified within the Care Inspectorate findings.

The requirements and recommendations from the Care Inspectorate findings have been met. Detailed information can be found in the Care Inspectorate's independent report published on the Care Inspectorate website.

What happens next?

The school has made progress since the original inspection. We will ask for a report on progress within nine months of the inspection. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement. This may include another inspection visit.

When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with Moray Council, that we intend to take.

Pamela Adamson
HM Inspector