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Date: 01/03/2023



Steven McPherson
HM Inspector
Education Scotland
By email:

Dear Steven

Riverbrae school

Following your return visit to Riverbrae school in 2021 and the subsequent letter regarding your findings published on 1 March 2022, the local authority agreed to provide you with an update of progress a year after publication of the letter. I now write to provide you with this information.

In your letter, you noted the progress made in taking forward the improvement actions from the original inspection in 2019. You noted the strengths of the school including the leadership of the headteacher and her team, which has created a greater sense of direction for school improvement. You also acknowledged that the school had been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and that these have had a significant impact on the work of the school. In your letter you stated that the school needed some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement, notably raising children's and young people's attainment and achievement. We have been working with the senior leadership team to take this forward.

This letter sets out the progress the school has made under the areas for improvement you referenced in your letter of 1 March 2022. We have confidence in the following as we have been working with the team at Riverbrae School and as part of our quality assurance framework have:

- Carried out a QI2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment review in October 2022 within the school and the nursery. This involved the Education Manager link for the school carrying out lesson observations and learning walks. During this visit there were also focus groups of children and young people and staff. A full report was written and agreed actions set.
- A further review was carried out in February 2023 where the Head of Service, Education Manager, Head teacher of Mary Russell School and Nursery Development Lead met with the Senior Management Team to review progress and discuss evidence along with speaking to staff groups. There was a clear focus on gathering evidence to provide you with confidence of progress through the improvement actions identified in December 2021.

Improvement Action 1

Senior leaders now need to ensure that continuous improvement is embedded further across the school and nursery leading to improved outcomes for all children and young people

Progress

There is now a clear understanding of the continuous improvement agenda across all staff groups and there has been an improved coherent quality improvement calendar implemented which dovetails with the whole school/local authority self-evaluation process. As such staff are clear about the priorities for improvement and their crucial contribution to this.

As part of the West partnership moderation group, the school has an ongoing focus on the moderation of literacy and numeracy target setting. This will enable a consistent approach to be taken across the school from nursery to senior phase. Principal teachers have been delivering target setting and planning workshops throughout the session. A baseline was established in June with regards to the learning across the school in relation to achievement of a level. Learning conversations and visits now take place according to a quality assurance calendar to provide robust discussions/support and challenge around progress made.

The school has set improvement targets for children using the continuum of engagement and complex milestones, referencing levels of support where the continuum was not individualised enough to evidence progress. Benchmarks were recorded in June 2021 in order that progress can now be tracked across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Targets are recorded within each learner's individual education plan (IEP). Data will be available this session for the first time across the continuum of engagement and the levels of support to evidence progress for individual children. The senior leadership team have clear plans in place on how this data will be used to inform improvement priorities and for target setting.

Senior phase data shows increased attainment in a range of national qualifications in a larger range of subjects, which reflects the school's drive towards increased personalisation and choice. The school's cohort is diverse, and almost all staff recognise the individual needs of children and plan accordingly to ensure that they achieve their potential e.g. the school is successfully presenting National 3 courses for the first time, building on progress achieved by young people between session 2020-21 and 2021-22. Also notably in session 2021-22, 100% of S4-S6 pupils achieved food preparation and hygiene at National 2 level.

The curriculum continues to be adapted in response to the context/needs of children and young people. For example, outdoor learning has been increased, and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is being offered. Work experience placements have been increased, with 100% of S6 pupils now experiencing work experience placements.

In the nursery, some progress has been demonstrated towards continuous improvement. Tracking documentation is now evident within children's folders, and the senior leaders have introduced appropriate tracking approaches. Staff training has been undertaken on observation, with new approaches showing improvement in the practice of staff. There are still important gaps that require an enhanced focus and action, as per the nursery's work towards continuous improvement. Senior leaders in the nursery have identified further areas for development, specifically:

- Documenting children's learning in a timeous manner
- Tracking children's progress consistently, through bespoke approaches
- Further embedding thorough record keeping of team meetings to demonstrate collegiate work towards improvement in children's experiences (records viewed showed this having taken place from January onwards)

We are confident that recent changes in staffing has increased capacity for this improvement to happen.

Improvement Action 2

Senior leaders and staff should now identify creative ways for more children and young people to take on leadership roles.

School staff have recognised that ensuring effective communication methods for every child enables them to have their voice heard, and to make their views and opinions known. In working to create a “total communication” environment, the school is making good progress in creating the basis for personalisation, choice and increased leadership opportunities for children and young people. There is a clear action plan in place to take this work forward which is understood by all. Throughout the school, opportunities for personalisation and choice have been increased, from the use of technology to the choice of activity and snack.

Improvements have been made in coordinating staff professional learning for example there is significant notable progress in that all staff are now trained in PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System); every class now has a visual timetable, and new approaches in the use of technology are being rolled out for example the use of voice buttons to link home with school. The Renfrewshire Inclusive Communication Environment (RICE) programme led by educational psychology has also been introduced across the whole school and has been adapted along with colleagues from speech and language therapy to ensure relevance for an Additional Support Needs (ASN) environment. The development of this approach is monitored by the senior leaders during support visits.

In the nursery, staff have progressed children as leaders through consideration of their free choice of areas to play and engage in. Further discussions on specific leadership opportunities mainly focussed on children’s involvement in food/lunch routines are being introduced. These will be further developed to consider leadership on a more personal level to children based on opportunities for leading on a particular task that develops a consistent skill.

In the senior phase, there are increased Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) options, and choices through Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) approaches, and pupil choice of work experience options has been expanded. Pupil leadership opportunities in the senior phase have increased significantly through sports leadership via the Renfrewshire School of Sport Education; leadership roles in the senior café, and in making community links. Pupils also lead on activities during lunchtime clubs. The school is currently in the early stages of developing a method of tracking pupil participation and leadership.

Improvement Action 3

Each child in the nursery now has a learning and development overview of their progress which teachers update at regular intervals. Senior leaders and practitioners need to ensure these processes are completed timeously for all children and continue to be reviewed regularly

The nursery has made some improvements in the application of children’s observations however these need to be further developed to ensure next steps are linked to children’s individual needs. Learning and Development overviews are in place for children within their individual folders however more work is required to ensure these are kept up to date. The nursery will now focus on the priority of embedding consistent tracking methods, with clear and regular monitoring approaches to ensure that children’s progress is robustly tracked timeously. The nursery will also give consideration to whether sections of the current

Progression Toolkit would be beneficial for some children. This would likely involve bespoke recording methods which incorporate multiple documents (learning and development overview and progression toolkit joined together.)

Improvement action 4

Nursery staff need to improve the quality of the outdoor spaces and develop more outdoor learning activities. Staff in the nursery should also continue to reflect on how the curriculum could be developed to meet better children's needs. This should include an increased focus on health and wellbeing, communication, numeracy and mathematics.

The nursery has made progress in the development of the outdoor environment, with clearer delineation of areas (water, music, climbing, growing and planting). There are plans for further enhancing these areas, with staff identified for leading the work. This work will include removal of large plastic resourcing, the development and use of curricular resources for outdoor learning, and further utilisation of natural materials which will enhance the quality and lines of curiosity and skill development across the curriculum within the outdoor environment.

Improvement action 5

Senior leaders now need to continue to raise expectations of what learners can achieve and to embed further individualised planning approaches. Teachers and practitioners would benefit greatly from increased scrutiny of their learning and teaching approaches

The school has revisited the curriculum offer, leading to higher expectations of attainment and achievement. The Talk for Writing model which is an authority led approach to improving writing has been introduced in Riverbrae on a bespoke basis, with four classes in primary and secondary currently participating in this approach. A core group of staff are leading on this, and the revised approach will be rolled out to all classes from next session. Teachers are also planning to run journal clubs linked to this approach. Training for Stages of Early Arithmetical Learning (SEAL) maths approaches has been undertaken and this is now being rolled out. Due to more robust summative assessment, individual children's' targets are more aspirational, and the focus on inclusion championed by the school has led to higher expectations of what each child can achieve both within Riverbrae and where appropriate in mainstream schools. The school plans to carry out further work with parents to ensure that their aspirations for their child's achievement is consistent with that of the school.

Within the senior phase, a hybrid curricular model has been introduced to suit the needs of learners. This involves classes with the same teacher for core subjects (literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing) and then timetabled classes for subjects of choice in the afternoon. The school benefitted from more collaborative working with other schools such as Mary Russell and Craigmarloch in working towards this model, in consultation with Riverbrae staff, pupils and parents.

Teachers feel supported in their assessment of children's progress through the learning conversations that they engage in weekly with stage partners. They stated that senior leaders have awareness of where each child is at in their learning and ensure that these learning conversations are matched appropriately. Senior leaders have undertaken recent learning visits to all classes and as a result are confident in their knowledge of learning and teaching approaches. Feedback on these visits have been given to all staff with clear next steps for improvement. Microsoft TEAMS is used effectively across the school as a communication tool and for sharing resources.

There is a focus on effective planning to meet learners needs for all staff across the school, teaching staff have been supported by senior leadership team to ensure individualised target setting is both aspirational and relevant to all our young people. Workshops have ensured professional learning support for all new staff who have joined Riverbrae this session. Teaching staff are using baseline assessment which feeds into each child's individualised educational programme for target setting. Through the learning conversations with teachers, senior leaders are able to track and monitor children progress using the continuum of engagement and levels of support from Education Scotland as a tool to assess and track progress.

In conclusion, the local authority is satisfied that sufficient progress is being made across Riverbrae school in relation to improvement actions highlighted within the Education Scotland visit. There is more work to do in relation to improvements within the nursery, and while progress is being made, this has not happened to the extent that we would have hoped. A further scrutiny visit will be made by the local authority in April 2023. We are confident that this can be managed by the local authority and do not plan to provide any further update to Education Scotland following this visit.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Susan Bell
Education Manager