

29 May 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

**The Community School of Auchterarder and Nursery Class
Perth and Kinross Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited and inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents, children and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children and young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports them 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 the new approaches to personal support, the nurture programmes, communication with parents and leadership of the all-through school. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Across all stages, children and young people get on well with their teachers. They learn in a safe and caring environment. Almost all children and young people are well behaved and show interest in their learning. In the nursery, children's learning is very enjoyable and motivating. There is an appropriate balance between free play and more structured adult-led learning activities. Children are increasing in confidence through talking about their interests, helping to plan activities and recording aspects of their own learning in a wide range of ways. For example, using digital cameras and talking and thinking books. In most primary and secondary classes, children and young people engage well in their learning, often working in pairs or teams. Increasingly, they work towards targets they set for themselves. In a few lessons, learning is too teacher directed. In the secondary, young people are beginning to see the connections across their learning in different subjects. In almost all primary classes, children use their 'I can' books and learning logs effectively to record what they have been doing and to share their learning with others, including their parents. Most young people at the secondary stages can use success criteria to evaluate their own learning and set next steps. These approaches are working well to help children and young people be more aware of how well they are learning. The new pupil councils are helping children and young people to contribute more to improving their school.

Most children in the nursery are making very good progress in their development and learning. They demonstrate caring attitudes to others for example, by entertaining residents of a local care home or as buddies through the effective Play-pal scheme.

Children readily take responsibility for example for collecting snacks and taking care of their own personal hygiene. They use computers and programmable robots confidently. At the primary and secondary stages, a significant number of pupils take on responsibilities and develop leadership skills as buddies at P1, P7 and S6. Large numbers of children and young people increase their creativity and self-esteem through involvement in sport, music and drama. They perform well in local and national events and in successful school concerts and productions. The international success of the girls' rugby team and the young people's contributions to the local *Lang Toon* event are noteworthy examples. Most young people in the secondary stages improve their achievements through the extensive range of out-of-class activities and excursions. Many young people benefit from challenging team-building experiences such as the very popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and programmes which lead to leadership and coaching awards. Staff are developing plans to broaden the range of achievement opportunities for children in the primary stages and to ensure all children and young people benefit from what is on offer.

Children in the nursery have made a strong start to developing literacy and numeracy skills. They listen attentively and talk confidently during small group discussions. Most are developing their early skills in reading and writing well. Most primary children are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and across other areas of the curriculum. Increasingly, they make effective use of literacy and numeracy skills in real situations including writing letters and reports, planning budgets and conducting surveys. In most subjects in S1 and S2, young people achieve well. However there is a need to ensure all staff plan learning which consistently enables young people to build on their attainment in primary. Overall, in S4 to S6, the school performs well in national examinations. Attainment at S5 has remained high and improved in recent years. An increasing proportion of young people are progressing to higher education. However, there remains scope for improvement in a few subjects.

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

Staff in the nursery know children very well as individuals. They use a range of approaches which ensure children's social, emotional and learning needs are well met. They interact skilfully to support children to develop their communication skills and take good account of children's interests when planning experiences. Across the primary and secondary stages, teachers plan tasks and activities which meet the needs of most children and young people well. Staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to supporting young people with additional support needs. Guidance and support for learning staff work very well with other agencies to make sure children and young people with particular needs can access appropriate learning. Young people speak very highly of the support they receive. The school has recently introduced a specialist nurture provision that is already providing invaluable support for children and young people who find a normal classroom environment difficult to cope with. There is a need to ensure all staff feel confident in working with the few children who display challenging behaviour. The school provides a range of enjoyable activities which very effectively support children to be confident in moving on from nursery to P1 and also from P7 to S1.

From nursery to S3, staff are developing more relevant, challenging and enjoyable learning. Primary children have started to benefit from lessons taught by secondary staff in art, science, physical education, music and modern languages. As a result, children's attainment and motivation in these subjects is increasing. The school should consider how this work could be extended to other areas and ensure that this high quality learning is consistently built on in S1 and S2. Children and young people have increasing opportunities to link learning across two or more subjects. Where this approach is embedded, children and young people deepen their understanding. The school has a number of effective partnerships which enhance the curriculum and support the development of skills for learning, work and life. For example, the school's very strong links with a prestigious local hotel enable young people to develop a range of hospitality skills and increase their knowledge of healthy eating. A few parents contribute their own skills and business interests to broaden the curriculum. In readiness for extending Curriculum for Excellence to S4 to S6, staff should ensure a consistent approach to planning for teaching, learning and assessment. Some important aspects of Curriculum for Excellence such as literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across learning, are not yet being planned in enough detail.

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

Across the school, most staff are reflective and keen to improve their own teaching. Most principal teachers lead improvements within their departments well. However, nursery, primary and secondary staff need to work together more often, as appropriate, and contribute jointly to improvement across the school. The current school improvement plan does not give enough emphasis to improving children and young people's learning and achievements. Staff use a range of approaches to evaluate their work. They now need to ensure this consistently leads to improvement. There is scope for depute headteachers and principal teachers to take a stronger role in developing staff's understanding of self-evaluation. During a period of significant change, the school has maintained high standards of attainment in the senior school. However, secondary staff are not yet fully confident in new approaches to assessment within S1 to S3.

Since taking up her post four years ago, the headteacher has faced the significant challenge of bringing staff from different stages of the school together with a common vision and purpose. There is further work to do to ensure that staff across the school work together to bring about improvement. There is a need to deploy the skills and experience of all staff in a more strategic way to benefit from the all-through nature of the school. Stronger teamwork, including with parents and learners and improved leadership across the school are required if the school is to continue building on its current strengths.

This inspection of your school and nursery class found the following key strengths.

- The quality of children's learning experiences in the nursery class.
- The behaviour and positive attitudes of children and young people in all classes.
- The support given to young people by guidance staff and school learning assistants.
- The contribution of secondary subject specialists to learning in the primary classes.
- Effective partnerships which enhance learning and achievement.

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

- Increase staff's understanding of Curriculum for Excellence to ensure consistently high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure self-evaluation and improvement planning lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Improve leadership of teamwork and school improvement within and across the nursery, primary and secondary stages.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

Whilst we are satisfied with the overall quality of provision, we are not confident that the school's leadership and self-evaluation are sufficiently leading to improvements. With support from the local authority and Education Scotland the school will be able to make the necessary improvements. Our District Inspector along with the local authority will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. Parents will be informed of the extent to which the school has improved.

Patricia Watson
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/TheCommunitySchoolOfAuchterarderPerthandKinross.asp>.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation. You can contact us at enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

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