

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 22 March 2022

BY: Executive Director – Education & Children’s Services

SUBJECT: Visit of Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class by Education Scotland

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report to Committee on the recent visit of Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class by Education Scotland to learn more about the support for children and their families through the COVID-19 pandemic, approaches to support children’s health and wellbeing, learning and progress and the school’s progress in taking forward the recommendations from the inspection which took place in June 2019.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:-
- (i) Note the content of the Education Scotland’s letter to parents dated 14 December 2021 (Appendix 1).
 - (ii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the support provided to children and families through the COVID-19 pandemic and the approaches to supporting children’s health and wellbeing, learning and progress.
 - (iii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the progress that has been made since the inspection visit by Education Scotland in June 2019.
 - (iv) Note that the inspectors identified that the school needs more time to take forward the recommendations from the original inspection and that they will carry out another visit to the school within one year of the publication of the letter to parents/carers to further report on progress the school has made.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class was inspected in June 2019. The inspection team agreed that the school required more time and support to make the necessary improvements and a further inspection would be carried out within one year of the publication of the letter to parents/carers.

3.2 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, inspections of schools by Education Scotland were paused in March 2020. In September 2021, Education Scotland announced a phased return to scrutiny activities engaging with those schools due to have a further inspection. The focus of the visits was the impact of the pandemic and the actions taken to support recovery and the progress around the areas for development identified in the earlier scrutiny activity.

3.3 The visit by Education Scotland to Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class took place on 1st and 2nd November 2021 and included discussions with the Head Teacher and staff, visits to classes and focus groups of pupils and parents/carers.

A letter of the findings was published to parents/carers on 14 December 2021.

3.4 Supporting children, young people and their families through COVID-19

In the letter to parents/carers, the inspectors acknowledged the challenges posed by COVID-19 particularly in relation to staff turnover and staff absences. They recognised the improvement in the school's approach to meeting the needs of children, including additional staffing to support children with additional support needs and those requiring further support with literacy. They noted the partnership work undertaken by the nursery team to support children and their families including maintaining contact through the health visitor and addressing gaps in children's speech development through speech and language.

The inspectors recognised how the approaches to promoting positive behaviour has had a positive impact on children's wellbeing and reduced interruptions to learning.

3.5 Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The inspectors noted that the Head Teacher has maintained a focus on addressing areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection and that school staff speak positively about his leadership and the changes made since his appointment.

The letter to parent/carers noted a number of areas of improvement since the previous inspection, including:

- work undertaken to develop positive, nurturing relationships with children which has resulted in a more calm, settled and purposeful learning environment;

- the work undertaken by staff to help children understand the aims of each lesson and how successful they have been at achieving these aims;
- staff confidence in using data to support children with their next steps in learning; and
- developments in writing which staff report provides clearer guidance on children's progression.

The inspectors noted the impact of the pandemic on the overall pace of improvement and that as a result, many improvements were at the early stages of implementation and yet to impact positively on improving outcomes for children. As planned, the Head Teacher should continue to ensure a whole school focus on raising attainment and achievement.

- 3.6 Overall, the inspection team recognised that the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and that staff were prioritising their plans to support the recovery. As a result the inspectors will carry out another visit to the school one year from the publication of the letter to parents/carers to allow more time for the school to take forward the recommendations from the original inspection.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial - None
- 6.2 Personnel - None
- 6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Education Scotland letter to parents of Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class dated 14 December 2021 (Appendix 1).

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DATE	4 February 2021

14 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school experienced a high turnover of staff resulting in a need to support further new and temporary staff to become familiar with agreed classroom approaches. Current staff absence continues to pose significant challenges for the headteacher and the school more generally. Upon return to school in August 2021, staff worked closely with the local authority to improve the school's approach to meeting the needs of all children. This includes using additional staffing to support children with their learning and wellbeing needs, including a focus on improving children's resilience. The school has also used additional staff effectively to support children with additional support needs and those identified as requiring further support, especially in literacy.

The nursery team work well together to address challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. They work well in partnership with external agencies such as the health visitor to maintain contact with children and their families. Staff identified gaps in children's speech development which they are addressing well in partnership with colleagues from speech and language therapy services.

The school remain focused on recovery, reconnecting children with their school setting and meeting children's needs. Supported well by the local authority, the headteacher ensures that every child has access to a digital device. This is providing staff and children with the opportunity to develop further their digital literacy skills. The headteacher has led approaches to promoting positive behaviour across the school and nursery. This impacts positively on children's wellbeing and has reduced interruptions to learning.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Parents, support staff and teachers speak positively about the headteacher's leadership and the changes that he has made since his appointment. For example, providing more opportunities for staff training and development and improving communication across the school community. The headteacher has maintained a focus on addressing areas for

improvement identified in the previous inspection. The headteacher and staff are well placed to address the identified priorities. All staff in the nursery now have a leadership role, providing important opportunities for them to lead areas for improvement. Quality assurance processes are in place and all staff participate in professional learning. Staff use formal and informal conversations well to improve their practice. Self-evaluation now features prominently in the nursery and is increasingly understood by all staff.

Staff across Macmerry Primary School and Nursery Class continue to work well to develop positive, nurturing relationships with children. As a result, the school is now more calm and settled and the learning environment is much more purposeful. In order to improve staff and children's understanding of wellbeing, senior leaders introduced a whole school approach to supporting children's emotional wellbeing. Staff have worked together to create nurturing classroom environments. While the school places a high priority on developing children's wellbeing, staff are aware that further work is required to improve the consistency of approaches to supporting children's wellbeing across the school. Staff have achieved some success in promoting positive behaviour across the school. As planned, the school should continue to engage parents and the wider school community in maintaining and improving further behaviour in classrooms and the playground. Staff also need to ensure that children work at an appropriate pace and provide more opportunities for them to work independently.

To improve consistency in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, the headteacher has worked together with staff to produce a guide highlighting the most important features of a class lesson. This has been welcomed by staff and is supporting discussions on improving the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff have undertaken significant work to help children understand the aims of each lesson and how successful they have been at achieving these aims. This work needs to develop further to include more of a focus on the quality of these interactions between staff and children. Children would benefit from being involved more fully in considering what they need to do to be successful in their learning.

As planned, staff need to ensure that learning is at the right level of difficulty for all learners. Children's learning has been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the pace of learning in lessons continues to be too slow with a majority of children making limited progress. Children would benefit from having a greater role in contributing to improvements in learning, teaching and assessment.

Staff work well with parents and partners to support children requiring additional support. Class teachers and support assistants are now clearer about available resources to support the needs of individual children. A timetable is in place for children to access regular support on a one-to-one or small group basis with a member of the leadership team. This support is very well-received by children and staff.

Staff know the children well and are becoming increasingly confident in using data to support children with their next steps in learning. The current school improvement plan highlights literacy, and in particular, writing as an area for improvement. Senior leaders have introduced a new writing programme. Staff report that this has provided clearer guidance on children's progression and is supporting teacher judgement of achievement at each Curriculum for Excellence level. As planned, staff need to develop further their shared understanding of national standards to ensure that the needs of all children are met. This approach should be extended across all areas of the curriculum.

Understandably, the pandemic has impacted on the overall pace of improvement. As a result, many improvements are at the early stages of implementation and are yet to impact positively on improving outcomes for children. There remains a need for senior leaders to strengthen leadership roles across the school and use more rigorous self-evaluation to evaluate the impact of improvement priorities. In discussion with the local authority officer and the headteacher, we agreed that significant improvements in attainment are required. As planned, the headteacher should continue to ensure a whole school focus on raising attainment and achievement.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are prioritising their plans to support recovery. As a result, the school needs more time to take forward the recommendations from the original inspection. We will carry out another visit to the school within one year of the publication of this letter. When we carry out another visit, we will write to you informing you of the progress the school has made.

John Reilly
HM Inspector