

18 June 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In May 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Sacred Heart Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Midlothian 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.

Staff should work together to ensure all children experience high quality learning and teaching. In doing so, staff should improve the planning of learning, teaching and assessment and ensure all children receive their entitlement to a broad curriculum.

All staff put children's needs and providing a secure and nurturing learning environment at the centre of their work. The acting headteacher has maintained a steadfast focus on bringing about change and improvement. There are positive relationships within all classes. All children are members of the new pupil voice groups. This is enhancing children's opportunities to be active participants in the school and share their views.

Senior leaders and staff have worked together well to develop their understanding of high-quality learning and teaching and improve children's learning experiences. Senior leaders and staff have reviewed and refreshed the school's learning, teaching and assessment policy. They have made considerable improvements to the planning of learning, teaching and assessment which is helping to improve the quality of teaching. In all classes, children use digital technology independently to support and enhance their learning. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop approaches to outdoor learning. Children are keen to use the spacious school grounds more frequently.

The acting headteacher has created a helpful planning guidance document which outlines planning expectations and guidelines for all staff. Teachers now plan across different timescales in all curricular areas using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). As a result, children experience a breadth of learning across the curriculum. Teachers now include children's views in the planning process. This is helping to motivate and engage children in their learning. The acting headteacher has developed a useful assessment calendar. Teachers use their assessments to support their professional judgements about children's attainment of CfE levels and move children's learning forward. A few parents would welcome more information about how their child is assessed and the progress their child is making. They would also welcome more opportunities to come into school to share in their child's learning.

Practitioners' collaborative working hours in the nursery have been re-organised. This is giving the team more time to participate in shared planning and professional learning. The acting depute headteacher and senior practitioner now participate in weekly planning meetings with practitioners. There are now more consistent approaches to the planning of

children's learning across the nursery which is improving children's experiences. Practitioners have undertaken professional learning on using observations to record and then plan children's learning. They are making more effective use of the school's planning and observation formats to capture children's learning. As planned, practitioners should continue to work together to develop a shared understanding of high-quality observations.

Teachers should continue to work together to raise attainment. They should increase their understanding of national expectations about what children can achieve across all areas of the curriculum.

Senior leaders and staff have made strong progress in raising attainment across the school. Overall, staff have raised levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. Children are making better progress. Most children are achieving expected CfE levels for literacy and numeracy. The majority of children who receive additional support for their learning are achieving nationally expected CfE levels. Across the school, there are a few children who exceed national expectations in certain aspects of a CfE level.

Senior leaders and staff have worked together well to develop a raising attainment strategy. Staff have worked closely with the Midlothian Council raising attainment teachers and undertaken valuable professional learning. This professional learning is increasing teachers' confidence and skills in delivering effective teaching. Senior leaders protect time for teachers to moderate children's work. Teachers have focused on children's writing. As a result, teachers now have a better understanding of assessment of writing and a shared understanding of standards. They use their discussions effectively to identify specific next steps in writing for groups and individuals. This is helping to raise attainment in writing across the school.

The newly introduced Midlothian Council data dashboard helps senior leaders to effectively monitor and track the progress of individuals, cohorts and classes. This, along with teachers' increasing use of the national Benchmarks, is improving teachers' understanding of national expectations in literacy and numeracy. Teachers should continue to develop their understanding and use of data to raise attainment in all curricular areas.

Staff should improve approaches to how they monitor children's progress in learning. They should use information on children's progress more effectively to raise attainment and improve how children's needs are met across the school and nursery.

Across the school and nursery, senior leaders and staff have made positive progress in monitoring children's progress in learning. This is helping them to meet children's needs more effectively across the school and raise attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

The acting headteacher has introduced more robust processes to monitor and track children's progress. Senior leaders and staff now have detailed data about children's progress and attainment. This more strategic approach is supporting staff well to develop a clearer understanding of children's progress.

Teachers and senior leaders now identify children who require targeted support to address gaps in their attainment. Teachers focus more carefully on removing barriers to learning to

meet children's needs and ensure they make progress. Senior leaders have a clear overview of interventions and gather evidence which demonstrates that these approaches are closing gaps in children's attainment. Learning assistants provide valuable small group interventions and are instrumental in helping to meet children's needs. As a result, children, including those requiring additional support, make better progress in their learning.

Staff received valuable professional learning on progression through CfE levels in reading. This is increasing their understanding of progress and is raising attainment in reading. Teachers use progression pathways in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing which are supporting them well to develop an understanding of breadth in learning. Teachers should continue to use these pathways to support further their understanding of progression through CfE levels.

Across the school and nursery staff support children's progress in health and wellbeing effectively. Children in the school complete surveys using the wellbeing indicators to highlight areas where they feel more secure and less secure. Staff use this information well to plan the health and wellbeing curriculum and ensure children make progress in this area.

Practitioners in the nursery support children to understand their emotions well. Children are happy in the setting and enjoy their play and learning. Practitioners' improving skills in planning are helping them well to identify the progress children make. All staff in the nursery team know children well. Practitioners now take small 'gather groups' to develop children's key skills. They identify children who require additional support in specific areas and put targeted interventions in place. This is having a positive impact on children's early communication skills.

Senior leaders identify that providing children with the correct level of challenge in their learning is an area for further development across the school and nursery. Staff across the school and nursery would benefit from further professional learning in planning and delivering high-quality learning that is set at different levels of difficulty.

Staff should improve the quality of learning through play across the early level.

Teachers and practitioners receive regular support from local authority officers to review and improve approaches to learning through play. They have made clear progress in this area. The acting deputy headteacher is providing valuable guidance to staff in improving the quality of play across the early level.

Staff in the school have been proactive in accessing professional learning and national practice guidance to improve their understanding of play-based learning. Practitioners in the nursery supported school staff well to make significant improvements to the learning environment. Children now have access to a wider range of natural materials and everyday objects within a stimulating environment. Most children are confident and independent in their learning. They enjoy capturing their learning and sharing it to the school's online platform. Children discuss confidently the Midlothian Learners' skills they are developing such as creativity and curiosity.

Within the nursery, the senior practitioner and the team collaborate well to improve all children's experiences. Children in the nursery are now more involved in the life of the

school. Practitioners have increased parental engagement through providing parents with 'stay and play' sessions. This is increasing children's motivation in their play and development. The nursery environment and resources are stimulating and engaging for children. Practitioners interact positively and sensitively with children encouraging them in their play and learning. Practitioners benefit from working together to moderate their observations of children's learning. This is helping them to develop a shared understanding of high-quality learning through play and make judgements about children's progress. Practitioners should continue to ensure they provide children with increasing levels of challenge to deepen their learning.

Practitioners in the nursery, and staff across the school, work together well to provide children with a few shared learning experiences using the joint outdoor space between the school and nursery. They should build on this positive practice and increase these opportunities. This will support children's continuity of learning across early level. Practitioners and school staff have a clear understanding of the rationale for play-based learning and are well-placed to take this work forward.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Midlothian Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Helen Mulholland
HM Inspector