

18 January 2022

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 North Muirton Primary School, 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 North Muirton Primary School. 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 officers the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection. As part of our visit, we saw the new arrangements for the early learning and childcare (ELC) provision for North Muirton Primary School, which has moved to Balhousie Primary School. This is in preparation for the planned merger of these two schools in a new building, which should be completed by April 2023. As the headteacher of Balhousie Primary School is the current registered manager for Balhousie and North Muirton ELC, we are not able to provide comment on the quality of provision in this report. However, we did talk with practitioners and the North Muirton Primary School senior leadership team about strategic improvements within the ELC. It is clear significant progress has been made since the original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

Senior leaders and staff were committed fully to supporting children and families by providing advice and practical help not only with learning but with wellbeing and pastoral care throughout the first lockdown. They went above and beyond to ensure all children had what they needed for their learning, making it very easily accessible. Staff ensured children had access to well-prepared learning activities via the school's digital platform. They offered paper learning packs and other resources for collection from the school playground and the local shop. Staff maintained regular contact with children and parents, with senior leaders monitoring learners' engagement. Where issues arose, staff were prompt to take action, making doorstep visits to offer assistance or to help families access support for wider needs. The headteacher issued clear guidance on remote learning to staff during lockdown periods. This ensured shared expectations and a level of consistency across the school and ELC setting. Senior leaders, recognising the potential impact of the situation on everyone's mental health, took action to alleviate social isolation, stress and anxiety. They created 'together time' videos and activities each week to help children, families and staff feel connected. The school became a focal point for the community as they worked to bring positivity during a challenging time.

Staff, now back in school, make good use of the whole-school assessment framework to identify where children are in their learning. They use a range of data and assessment evidence to plan appropriate next steps and address any gaps that emerge in their learning. Parental engagement with children's learning is greater as a result of remote learning. Staff

and pupils are now more confident in their use of digital technology and make greater use of outdoor spaces for learning. Teachers continue to work collaboratively, using evidence-based approaches to support children's progress.

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 places significant pressure on senior leaders and staff. Staff recognise that children may require ongoing support with anxiety and mixing socially with others to re-engage with learning in school. They implement a range of strategies to support all children, with a focus on nurture and social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Staff implement clear plans and targeted interventions for identified children requiring additional support to meet their individual needs. Staff and pupil COVID-19 related absence make the day-to-day running of the school challenging.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The school is making good progress overall in the key areas for improvement identified during the original inspection. Since then, the senior leadership team has undergone several changes, however the focus and drive to improve outcomes for children has remained strong throughout. The headteacher took up post shortly after the original inspection. She provides very effective leadership and strategic direction, demonstrating determination in her ambition for the whole school community. The headteacher maintains a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children. Ably supported by the senior leadership team, she ensures that the school continues to move forward despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. Senior leaders empower others, encouraging shared leadership very well. They have gained the trust and respect of all staff. The 'this is it' guidance, developed collegiately by staff, provides advice and clear expectations of practice. This supports improved consistency in the quality of learning and teaching across the school very well. All staff are fully committed to professional learning. They embrace opportunities for leadership and collaboration. The local authority supports teachers and practitioners to improve their pedagogy. Increasingly, staff are becoming reflective in their practice. Most children across the school engage well with the variety of learning experiences on offer. They enjoy opportunities to lead and take responsibility for their own learning and talk about their next steps with growing confidence. Staff should continue to develop children's independent learning skills and ensure that all activities are set to provide appropriate support, pace and challenge for all.

Staff make effective use of the new assessment framework to gather a wide range of assessment evidence to measure children's progress. This helps to identify any gaps in learning. Teachers consider assessment at the planning stages and review assessment evidence against National Benchmarks to inform further planning. They should continue to develop approaches to high-quality assessment that allow children to demonstrate their skills and learning in new and unfamiliar contexts. Staff develop a shared understanding of standards, progress and achievement through regular conversations about assessment and opportunities for staff to plan collaboratively. Staff use progression pathways effectively to support planning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff should continue, as planned, to develop their use of progression pathways in all curriculum areas. They should also continue to develop the North Muirton Achievement Framework to promote and track children's participation, skills and wider achievements.

Senior leaders use a robust quality assurance calendar to monitor practice across the school.

They sample children's work and participate in meaningful conversations about assessment standards to support increasingly robust professional judgements in literacy and numeracy. Class teachers now analyse and use the wide range of assessment data available more effectively. This helps them to plan appropriate next steps at an individual and whole class level. Senior leaders meet regularly with staff to talk about children's progress as part of the robust monitoring and tracking process now in place. This gives a clear overview of progress across the whole school as well as in key aspects of learning and development. As a result, senior leaders and staff identify, and put in place, additional support or challenge which may be required. Staff implement planned interventions and strategies promptly with clear measures in place to assess the impact on children's progress. Data provided by the school indicates that despite the disruption caused by COVID-19, attainment in literacy and numeracy has continued to improve across the school over the past two years.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these have had a significant impact on the work of the school, it is commendable that staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. They have remained committed to improving practice and are implementing plans to support recovery. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. Perth and Kinross Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Susie Smith
HM Inspector