

Local Authority Report to Education Scotland

Applegrove Primary School

August 2019



Background

In June 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Applegrove Primary School setting out a number of areas for improvements agreed by the school and Moray Council following short model inspection in March 2017. This inspection visit focused on QI 1.1 (Self-evaluation for self-improvement) and QI 3.2 (Raising attainment and achievement), both evaluated as 'weak'. As a result, Education Scotland intimated intention to return to carry out a further inspection of Applegrove Primary School within 12 months from initial inspection. In June 2017, the following strengths and areas for improvement in the school's work were identified:

Strengths:

- Polite, friendly, well behaved children who are motivated to learn and proud of their achievements in school and the local community
- Warm, caring relationships between children and staff leading to a school culture where children feel safe, happy and valued
- High quality targeted support for children accessing the 'Wee Room'. This is leading to positive outcomes in children's wellbeing and progress with their learning

Areas for Improvement:

- The school needs to take a more rigorous and focussed approach to self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement planning. Led by the Headteacher, the school must adopt a more collaborative approach to measuring the quality of its work. In particular, there is a need to better gather the views of children, parents and partners on the quality of school provision
- Raise attainment and achievement of children, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Further develop approaches to assessment and agreeing of standards to effectively track children's progress with their learning
- Increase leadership opportunities for staff, children and parents in taking forward school improvement priorities
- Ensure learning activities have appropriate pace and challenge for all children. More innovative approaches to learning and teaching should be encouraged and shared across the school

In June 2018, Education Scotland returned to visit Applegrove Primary School, with a further letter to parents/carers published in September 2018. This return visit focused on the areas for improvement identified in June 2017 inspection outlined above, reporting on school improvement made in relation to these areas. A Moray Council Quality Improvement Officer was also invited to join the inspection team and further contribute to the writing of the inspection findings and inspection letter.

Following this return visit, it was noted that the school had made progress since the original inspection and as such, Education Scotland would ask for a report on progress from Moray Council within one year of inspection. This report would then inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement which may include another inspection visit. This local authority report forms the report on progress requested by Education Scotland following return visit in June 2018. Progress outlined below is based on 'Areas for Improvement' identified in June 2017 inspection, further reviewed and evaluated in June 2018 revisit (letter to parents/carers published in September 2018). School self-evaluation, classroom visits and discussions with pupils and staff form the basis for this report following authority report visit on Wednesday, 12 June 2019 to Applegrove Primary School.

School Context

Applegrove Primary School is a non-denominational Primary School situated in the centre of Forres, set within extensive school grounds. Opened in 1959, Applegrove Primary School underwent considerable refurbishment and modernisation works in 2017 and offers a broad range of facilities including outside playing fields, computer suite, general purpose classrooms for Art, Music and Drama and separate Games Hall for Physical Education. Applegrove Primary School has an Enhanced Provision Base – the “Wee Room” – used by children from within and outwith catchment area. At the end of session 2018/2019, school roll stands at 282 pupils with 144 pupils marked as having an Additional Support Need (ASN), equating to 51.1% of the school roll.

The substantive Headteacher of Applegrove Primary School was absent from work in term 1 of session 2018/2019. This absence from work led to appointment of an Acting Headteacher in November 2018; an experienced substantive Headteacher in another of our Moray Primary Schools. The school was further supported by appointment of a substantive Depute Headteacher in January 2019, previously the acting Depute Headteacher in post from September 2018 following departure of the previous Acting Depute Headteacher in late June 2018. The Senior Leadership Team in place continue to drive forwards with the school improvement agenda, working together with the Principal Teacher (Additional Support Needs) as part of the extended Senior Leadership Team and whole school community to realise authentic school improvement. The substantive Head Teacher has since moved on from post, where following a period of time with an Acting Head Teacher from another school in Moray as noted above, a substantive Head Teacher is now in post (December 2019).

Commentary against areas for improvement identified are now made below, using Education Scotland core headings identified in June 2017 as structure, as further reported on in September 2018.

Area for Improvement 1

The school needs to take a more rigorous and focussed approach to self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement planning. Led by the Headteacher, the school must adopt a more collaborative approach to measuring the quality of its work. In particular, there is a need to better gather the views of children, parents and partners on the quality of school provision

Led by the Acting Headteacher, Depute Headteacher and extended Senior Leadership Team, work continues in partnership with the local authority in order to drive forward school improvement. The comprehensive School Improvement Action Plan remains in place framed by the five core “Applegrove Apples” for improvement, with continual Senior Leadership Team and authority monitoring for progress and formal action plan reporting taking place termly. This is based on a wide range of self-evaluation involving pupils, staff and parents in the school’s improvement journey with comprehensive school self-evaluation calendar and processes now in place.

Following refresh of the school Vision and Values, “Apple Awards” have been introduced following school community consultation, linked to refreshed school values, now at the centre of conversations and feedback with pupils and families. Staff and pupil leadership has been extended to key working groups on literacy and numeracy with four new pupil committees formed and plans underway to develop a “PIP” (Pupil Improvement Plan) following School Council visit to another school to understand how a Pupil Improvement Plan is created. Pupil voice is central across the school to directing improvements in environment, ethos and learning.

Staff continue to work collaboratively together at school level, with colleagues within the Associated Schools Group and in wider Moray, undertaking work on moderation and sharing good practice. There is strengthened practitioner confidence across the school supporting consistency in approach across stages, ensuring children learn and achieve at a level and pace commensurate with their developing abilities. Staff views are gathered in a collegiate manner, with staff meetings supporting practice and providing an

open forum for professional discussion. Staff have agreed a Working Time Agreement for collegiate activities, enabling ownership of School Improvement Priorities through working in stage groups and whole school input through development meetings. Introduction of the local authority “back to basics” self-evaluation profile will further support peer observation and support, providing quality feedback on learning observations through a coaching approach and strengthening practice. Initial work undertaken on peer moderation has supported practitioner dialogue on learner level achievement and next steps for professional learning.

Quality assurance now extends to supportive dialogue and feedback through activities including work and jotter monitoring, with improvement points agreed for strengthening practice. School approaches to tracking and monitoring pupil attainment, achievement and professional dialogue that results – including tracking children’s progress over time – are leading to notable improvements in children’s progress. Positive impact has been realised through increased practitioner confidence in their professional judgements supported by Education Scotland’s benchmarks. Feedback and next steps are discussed alongside impact from interventions by the extended Senior Leadership Team.

Parents are viewed as key partners in their children’s learning, with parents welcomed in to school through a variety of fundraising and learning events, including “Meet the Teacher” sessions, “Shared Learning afternoons”, embedded termly “Achievement Assembly” and wider parent forum. Parental feedback is sought on a regular basis with actions resulting in improvements to communication and further informing school improvement priorities moving forwards. Provision for children with Additional Support Needs in the “Wee Room” and across the school remains very strong, with creative approaches to learning supporting development.

Area for Improvement 2

Raise attainment and achievement of children, particularly in literacy and numeracy

Overall, good progress has been made in raising attainment across the school, with data analysis at all levels leading to universal and targeted interventions. The school has a clear overview of children’s progress in learning. Tracking is undertaken termly using the local authority developed Broad General Education “Moray Tracker” with DAtA (Driving Attainment and Achievement) meetings held with the Acting Head Teacher and Principal Teacher of Additional Support for Learning (ASN) leading to Applegrove being highlighted as good practice within Moray. An interventions “Needs and Provision” mapping format has been introduced to further support discussion and next steps, showing pupil needs and current interventions alongside review of impact of interventions. Teacher Professional Judgements are made with increased confidence, supported by National Benchmarks and clear curriculum progressions.

In addition to increased focus on Moderation outlined above, the school have reviewed approaches to raising attainment in Literacy. The school has adopted Northern Alliance Emerging Literacy, resourcing accordingly, with positive outcomes realised at P1 as reflected in ACEL and SNSA data presented. All staff have been trained in “Big Writing” with jotter monitoring supporting positive change including consistency in layout and presentation. Literacy marking keys have been introduced and Scottish criterion and technical target pencils have been introduced to support children’s learning conversation and target setting in Literacy. Step by Step, “Step up to writing” progression and writing booklets with staged learning intentions and success criteria have been introduced for functional writing from P1 to P5.

Writing models exemplifying good practice in different genres have also been made available to support consistency across the school. Clear next steps have been identified following review of focused approaches introduced with talk for writing and use of Lexia for reading skills development as required identified as next steps. As a result, notable improvements in attainment in Reading and Writing in particular have resulted at early and middle stages.

In order to raise attainment in Numeracy, the Depute Headteacher has been trained in SEAL (Stages of Early Arithmetical Learning) and has cascaded training to all staff during recent Inset activities in support of identifying gaps in numeracy skills for targeting support. Numeracy assessments have taken place (P3-P7) in order to identify gaps in knowledge and skills. The Depute Headteacher is covering staff across the school to allow for SEAL assessment to take place, further supporting consistency in approach to learning and teaching in Numeracy. P2-P7 Sumdog Diagnostic data is collected and reviewed for same. Jo Boaler's Mathematical Mindset approaches and workshops for making maths fun are underway including review of maths homework and collaborative problem solving in upper school.

The Principal Teacher (Learning and Teaching) is leading Maths week activities and staff training in Heinemann Active Maths. Intensive targeted support at the middle stages has further supported increased attainment with increased confidence of P1 stage teachers in Numeracy learning and teaching. As a result, Numeracy attainment at P1 and P4 in particular and P7 alongside interim stages are strengthening.

Area for Improvement 3

Further develop approaches to assessment and agreeing of standards to effectively track children's progress with their learning

Teachers assess children's progress in learning using a range of assessments and gather evidence to support their teacher professional judgements supported by National Benchmarks. Through moderation activities, raising attainment DAtA meetings and collaboration through staff meetings and at other collegiate times, staff engage well with the National Benchmarks using these to assess children's progress. Staff have adopted an evidence based approach in strengthening their teacher professional judgements, supporting attendance at DAtA meetings with a range of work samples and evidence. Through dialogue at these meetings, support and challenge of teacher professional judgements has resulted alongside review of impact of interventions as noted previously.

While not aligned to benchmarks, SNSA data is also reviewed for any noted differences in order to close identified attainment gaps for individual pupils and cohorts. Curriculum progressions are in place across the curriculum and are aligned to National Benchmarks and teachers use these when planning learning and teaching, using a range of formal and informal assessments to gather evidence to judge learner level achievement. Revised and streamlined planning formats are now in use in order to plan for long and medium term with planning folders with progression pathways in place across the school. Forward planning is monitored with feedback and support provided, where teachers have choice over daily/weekly formats appropriate to the needs of their classes. Following Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Inset activities in November 2018, skills are now embedded within the curriculum and planning, with World of Work group approach evaluated and now included in termly and IDL planning rather than skills as an addendum to the curriculum.

Where moderation has been a key focus with every member of staff holding a "moderation journal" to support rigour in moderation within the school, most staff have good understanding of systems and processes in place for moderation with next step identified as consistency in judgements for achievement of all and closing all poverty, additional support need or attendance related attainment gaps. The school has rigorous arrangements and processes for tracking, monitoring, data analysis and collegiate discussion for resulting interventions in place with impact measured on an ongoing basis for review, evaluation and next steps.

Area for Improvement 4

Increase leadership opportunities for staff, children and parents in taking forward school improvement priorities

Leadership at all levels, involving all key groups across the school community continues to strengthen. All staff are offered opportunity to be involved in decision making and are working together collaboratively for improvement, embracing key meetings including stage planning meetings, staff meetings, school improvement developments and moderation. All staff are encouraged to share views, offer suggestions and lead through an SLT “open door” policy, with tackling bureaucracy at the forefront and removal of a number of unnecessary administrative and recording processes. Staff are fully involved in discussions on school improvement and progress with plans to extend staff involvement as the school moves back to a School Improvement Plan cycle in future years.

All staff are encouraged to lead on key school improvement activities and take a lead on key learning and teaching themes including curriculum area development groups, IDL and moderation. Most staff further support pupil groups with new focus for pupil leadership through Eco, Sustainability, Rights Respecting and JRSO clubs and committees. Through these, children are developing key skills including teamwork, problem solving, decision making, creativity and leadership with achievement monitored by the school to ensure no child is at risk of missing out. These are further celebrated and promoted through social media, school newsletters, displays, assemblies and school website. Pupil leadership is further extended through wider pupil leadership opportunities including School Council, House Captains and Vice Captains. The latter are also involved in weekly Religious and Moral Reflection (RMR) Assemblies, collecting weekly house points, updating the “Special Mentions” infants display and organising Achievements Assemblies. Where gaps in participation and involvement are identified, creative ways to fill these are found.

Children are further involved in leading learning with notable work undertaken over the session on co-creation of Success Criteria, involving learners in learning conversations and planning their own next steps in literacy and numeracy based learning alongside planned work on learning journals in support of wider parental engagement. In the majority of classes, learner views are sought on work undertaken and next steps leading to changes in learning and teaching approaches and support.

Parents are keen to share in their children’s successes and achievements as evidenced through strong attendance at Parents’ Evenings and events including Assemblies, also used to gather parent views. All classes hold shared learning afternoons to increase parental engagement further in learning. School Council consulted with parents on updated Vision and Values where School Improvement Priorities are also discussed and shared at Parent Council. Parent Council is currently undergoing rebranding as “Friends of Applegrove” for extended reach and increased membership with plans underway to further extend parental engagement and parental involvement in children’s learning. Working in partnership with the school community, Applegrove Primary School is progressing well with school improvement priorities.

Area for Improvement 5

Ensure learning activities have appropriate pace and challenge for all children. More innovative approaches to learning and teaching should be encouraged and shared across the school

Throughout the session, learning visits and classroom observations have been undertaken by the Acting Headteacher, Depute Headteacher and peer visits have been facilitated where possible. Following Senior Leadership Team observations, school overviews are used to provide feedback on observations, jotter monitoring and consistency of learning and teaching. Strengths are highlighted and areas for improvement are shared and agreed with staff. Feedback on writing jotters, planning and reading have

also been shared. Written and verbal feedback from joint observations carried out by AHT and DHT are shared promptly and have direct and immediate impact on improving classroom practice. Staff meeting focus is driven by CLPL needs of staff following such self-evaluation activity with good practice in teaching and learning further shared at the beginning of each staff meeting. Following formal Quality Improvement Officer classroom visits (joint with Senior Leaders), observations are captured with evaluative commentary visit reports shared with staff and next steps discussed with the extended Senior Leadership Team for further action and evaluation of impact for next steps.

Literacy and numeracy have been identified for areas for improvement on the SIP with jotter monitoring in writing leading to a number of improvements to promote consistency and improve standards across the school. Monitoring and feedback on reading lessons given individually and a school overview of strengths and areas for improvement to be shared. Agreed stage planning time allows staff to take forwards SIP improvements with focus on literacy in recent months.

The following commentary is provided following authority report visit on Wednesday, 12 June 2019 to Applegrove Primary School. Classes across stages were visited with focus on learning and teaching activities underway including pace and challenge, consistency in approaches and creativity and innovation with regards to learning and teaching activities:

The environment for learning across all classes is positive and nurturing with eager and active learners in most lessons. Clear Learning Intentions with linked Success Criteria were evident in almost all classes, co-created with learners in less than half of lessons visited. In dialogue with learners, in most classes learners understood the purpose of their learning with a range of teaching approaches used to support learners to become more independent in their learning in the majority of lessons. Supported and visibly referenced throughout the school and supported by The Applegrove Learning Cycle, activities in the majority of lessons were appropriately differentiated in order to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners and learning needs as noted by school ASN profile. Staff including Pupil Support Assistants know children well across classes and support learning of individuals and groups.

Teachers used skilled questioning in the majority of lessons to check for understanding, with open-ended questioning in less than half of lessons also observed. This was predominantly observed in middle and upper stages. Ongoing formative assessment and verbal feedback to learners was evident in most lessons with clear next steps in learning evident in the majority of lessons observed with 'in the moment' dialogue and feedback. Learners were engaged in self and peer assessment in the majority of lessons observed, with learners providing feedback to peers on next steps in learning as appropriate.

A range of teaching methodologies and approaches were used including direct teacher instruction, individual and group tasks, paired tasks, discussion and project based learning, ICT based learning, open-ended tasks, station and carousel based approaches, pupil-led learning, teacher-facilitator to learning. Across lessons, almost all pupils were engaged in their learning with worksheet and textbook based instruction observed in few lessons. In most lessons, learners appeared to find learning and teaching activities to be appropriately challenging and enjoyable. In a few lessons, learners were empowered to choose how they approached learning activities and supported by staff, choose level of activity with positive end outcomes. Most learning and teaching activities were classroom based, with strong links in the majority of classes to skills under development – including explicit in a few classes through co-creation of Success Criteria – and the world of work. In a few lessons, HOTS (higher order thinking skills) were promoted with children able to outline key roles they were undertaking in learning tasks.

Through revised approaches to planning of learning, teaching and assessment and increased emphasis as a school on moderation for teacher professional judgment on learner progress and achievement, pace of learning was appropriate in most classes. Supported by progression pathways aligned to national benchmarks across curriculum areas with rigorous tracking and monitoring leading to interventions in support and challenge of learning, raised attainment is noted through a more consistent approach to

learning and teaching across the school. The Applegrove Learning Cycle is further embedded through learning conversations using iPads. On speaking with children across stages, most are developing a language of learning linked to the Applegrove Learning Cycle across the school. Termly learning conversations are carried out with all pupils by class teachers and used to set learning targets which are shared with parents on Continuous Progress Reports. These provide parents with further prompts for home learning conversations.

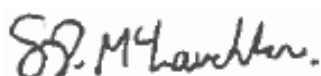
More innovative approaches to learning and teaching are developing through increased collaboration and whole staff ownership of improvement. For example, upper stage pupils have been involved in digital literacy activities producing animations and videos. Digital technologies pathways form part of teacher planning with resource and activities to be used alongside progressions to exemplify quality learning experiences. School Council will also be involved in the Young Inspectors programme (Leaders of Learning) next session, looking at learning and teaching through children's lens, further supporting consistency in quality of learning and teaching through children's voice.

Notable changes to delivery of Literacy and Numeracy learning as noted previously through new learning and teaching programmes and teaching models introduced is supporting school raising attainment agenda. Staff across the school as advised in September 2018 letter to parents (noted following feedback in June 2018 visit) have focused activities on raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. Attainment data shows positive change and good impact from this focus.

Next Steps

Following review of school progress to date and inspection findings with next steps identified, Applegrove Primary School has made notable progress since the original inspection in June 2017 and revisit in June 2018. Positive changes to school ethos and strong focus on learning and teaching underpinned by wider school developments in Health and Wellbeing have resulted in raised attainment and achievement for all learners. Mutually positive rights respecting relationships are noted across the school community with children's wellbeing at the heart of the life and work of the school.

We are confident that Applegrove Primary School has capacity for continued improvement with ongoing support and challenge from the local authority. Noteworthy progress has been made as a school community with clear agenda set out for future progress and change. In the early part of session 2019/2020, Moray Council reviewed school leadership arrangements with appointment of a substantive Head Teacher to complement the strengthened Extended Leadership Team and wider staff team. Moray Council will thereafter continue to work more intensively with the substantive postholder during an extended transition period to ensure school improvement continues to progress at pace.



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