

26 November 2013

Dear Parent/Carer

**Chirnside Primary School and Nursery Class
Scottish Borders Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children 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 impact of the teachers' professional learning community on learning and teaching, and how well new planning approaches are helping to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. We also looked at how well outdoor learning is enhancing the curriculum. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the school, which includes the nursery, children are mostly well behaved and enjoy their learning. Children feel safe at school and staff treat them fairly and with respect. In the nursery, children are very well settled. They can choose where they want to play and which activity they would like to engage with. Many can happily play in a group and can persevere on tasks when working individually. At the primary stages, teachers make it clear to children what they are learning and how they will know if they are successful. Nursery and primary staff now need to develop further children's skills in talking about their learning so that they understand their strengths, development needs and next steps. Children have a few opportunities to take on roles of responsibility such as serving on the pupil council or eco group. However, children at all stages would benefit from more opportunities to take on responsibilities which encourage them to develop their independence and leadership skills. Children, staff and parents work well together to make a contribution to the local community. For example, children have developed their knowledge about their local culture and heritage through working with the community to commemorate the Battle of Flodden in its 500th anniversary year.

Across the school, children are making good progress with their learning in English language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy. In the nursery, most children communicate well with others. They listen well and are learning to take turns during group discussions. Many children independently explore books in the library corner and are developing an interest in reading. Most can sort and match. Almost all can count to ten with a few able to count beyond twenty. Staff should continue to develop children's skills in early writing across the playroom and outside. At the primary

stages, children read well, with understanding and with expression. They can talk enthusiastically about their favourite author. Children listen well to adults, but a few need to improve their listening skills when working with each other in small groups. Children write for a range of purposes. A few have had success in a poetry competition with their poems being published. We have asked teachers to have consistently high expectations of children's writing across the school. This will ensure that children's skills continue to improve. In mathematics, children are responding well to revised learning and teaching approaches which are making learning more active for them. They are enjoying developing their mental agility through challenges and games. They need more opportunities to apply their numerical skills in other areas of learning. Children can confidently analyse and present data in different formats. Across the school, children cannot yet use a range of strategies to solve mathematical problems. Children are making very good progress in physical education. They have a particularly good understanding of the benefits of physical activity and healthy eating.

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

Teaching and non-teaching staff contribute to providing a nurturing and inclusive environment across the school. They provide a high level of support and encouragement to help children achieve. The school has effective procedures in place to identify and support children who need extra support with their learning. A few children with additional support needs who spend some of their school week in the Berwickshire Support Base are supported very well in their learning by staff and children. Staff work well with partners such as health professionals and the Home School Link Worker to provide appropriate support to children and families. Classroom assistants and additional needs assistants support children's needs well. Children experience a range of interesting activities. However, these are not always set at an appropriate level of difficulty to meet the needs of all children in each class. Some good practice in setting varied and challenging homework tasks, which support learning in class, needs to be extended across the school.

Staff provide children with a broad curriculum. They are becoming increasingly confident in planning experiences for children which take account of the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. The nursery curriculum is appropriately based on play. Children in the nursery would benefit from further opportunities to learn in relevant contexts in their local community. At the primary stages, teachers have worked well together to develop new English language and mathematics learning programmes which are developing children's knowledge and skills in a progressive way. In their professional learning community within Chirnside, teachers have worked hard to plan meaningful assessment of children's progress and achievement in these areas of the curriculum. They now need to transfer the valuable learning from these developments to increase the pace of implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Outdoor learning is progressing well and enhancing children's experiences. Commendably, children at the primary stages are developing skills for life and work through participating in risk assessments before completing science experiments or embarking on outdoor learning. A physical education specialist and the Active Schools Coordinator are making a significant contribution to children's physical wellbeing through providing and promoting opportunities for physical activity and sporting achievement. There are appropriate arrangements in place to support children's pastoral needs as they move

from home to nursery, from nursery to P1 and from P7 to secondary school. The school should continue to build on its curricular links with Berwickshire High School to ensure continuity in children's learning.

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

The headteacher is well regarded by children, parents, staff and the local community. He has a clear vision for the future of the school which he has shared with children, staff and parents. He has led important improvements in learning and teaching. The headteacher is supported well by a deputy headteacher and a principal teacher who carry out their remits conscientiously. Staff are keen to develop their skills and engage very well together in their professional learning community within Chirnside Primary School. They visit each other's classes, discuss learning and teaching together and try out new approaches in their classrooms. The school should now ensure that staff take on further leadership roles across the school. This will help increase the pace of curriculum development. The school has a range of ways to monitor and evaluate the quality of its work. This includes sampling children's work and seeking out the views of children and parents. The school has recently introduced a number of new approaches to evaluating and improving its work. More time is needed for these new approaches to lead to the planned improvements in children's learning and achievement. Tracking procedures for assessing children's progress and achievement in English language and mathematics need to be developed further and extended across other curriculum areas. This will ensure children make suitable progress across all areas of their learning. Under the leadership of the headteacher, the school has the capacity to improve further.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Confident children who are achieving well in physical education, activity and sport.
- The commitment of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, to enriching children's experiences.
- The headteacher's leadership of improving approaches to learning and teaching.

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

- Improve children's involvement in their learning.
- Increase the pace of implementation of Curriculum for Excellence through developing leadership at all levels.
- Continue to develop approaches to self-evaluation to ensure continuous improvement.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Scottish Borders Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Marie McAdam
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/ChirinsidePrimarySchoolScottishBorders.asp>

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