

7 October 2025

Dear Parent/Carer

In April 2024, HM Inspectors published a letter on Sanquhar Primary School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Dumfries and Galloway 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.

The headteacher, with support from the local authority, should ensure they prioritise school improvement based on robust self-evaluation to improve the pace of change. Senior leaders and staff should ensure there are clear action plans with manageable, achievable targets for key areas of school improvement.

There have been clear improvements in this area for development.

Senior leaders and staff identified key areas for improvement after the initial inspection. They conducted a consultation and developed a school improvement plan focused on the right areas for development and based on the findings from the initial inspection. Most staff feel a greater sense of ownership of this plan. Children have been involved in developing a pupil friendly version of this improvement plan. This is helping them to feel more empowered as part of the school's decision-making process and supports them to have a greater voice and ownership of school improvement priorities. Senior leaders are implementing changes identified within the new school improvement plan at a fast and manageable pace.

Senior leaders are now taking a more consistent approach to classroom observations as part of their quality assurance processes. Clearer guidance on classroom standards and expectations is beginning to have a positive impact on children's experiences. Senior leaders provide valuable feedback to staff to support them to make improvements to their practice. They also recognise where there are positive aspects of teaching and learning which can be shared across the team. Senior leaders should now ensure that staff have more regular opportunities to engage in focussed discussions about their practice. Teachers are keen to continue share good practice with each other and work together as a team.

Staff are facilitating pupil leadership groups which are having a positive impact on children's experiences in school. These include, digital leaders, an eco-group and a children's rights team. These groups are supporting children well to develop a range of important skills. As a result, children are developing well their leadership skills, communication and teamwork. Staff should continue to empower children to lead on key areas of school improvement.

Senior leaders and teachers are now more aware of gaps in children's learning. This is informing planning for the use of Pupil Equity Funds (PEF). Senior leaders now ensure that all staff, children and parents are fully consulted on how PEF is used to support children

impacted by socio-economic challenges. They now need to continue to work with staff to closely monitor the progress, attainment and achievement of targeted children more robustly.

Staff in the Learning Centre (LC) have co-constructed an improvement plan with key stakeholders, based on the school improvement plan (SIP). They also put together a timeline for key priorities to ensure that improvement progresses at an appropriate pace. This plan is revisited and updated regularly at staff meetings. As a result, staff have redesigned one of the classrooms so that learning activities can be organised through a play-based approach.

LC teachers are involved in termly, attainment and planning meetings with senior and middle leaders. They find these helpful when considering potential interventions and learning and teaching approaches to support individual children.

The headteacher should work with all staff to develop more rigorous approaches to monitoring the quality of learning, teaching and assessment to ensure this is of a consistently high quality across the school and learning centre.

There has been positive progress in this area for development.

Senior leaders and staff have now developed appropriate and helpful action plans to address previous inconsistencies in learning and teaching. They used effectively the feedback from the original inspection to identify clearly where improvement to the consistency of learning and teaching could be made. Together, staff have focused on ensuring children are clear on the purpose of learning and know how they have been successful in lessons. Teachers have developed further their use of questioning and the techniques that support children to engage in quality discussions about their learning. Teachers should continue to embed these techniques throughout their lessons to develop further children's understanding of the skills they gain as a result of learning.

Staff have rightly identified the need to review and improve learning environments across the school. The majority of teachers have developed well-organised and attractive classrooms. Children enjoy learning in spaces that are tidy with well-organised resources. Senior leaders and teachers now need to establish clear expectations of classroom environments. Teachers should also ensure that children's work is celebrated and examples of children achieving success are displayed to support the learning of others.

Teachers now use a lesson structure more consistently which is beginning to improve the pace of learning and teaching. Children respond very positively to opportunities to work in pairs and trios. Almost all work well as a team and sustain their concentration on the learning activities. In a few lessons, children require clearer expectations and firmer boundaries to ensure their behaviour and choices help them and others learn in a positive environment.

Teachers are now able to gather more reliable evidence of children's progress and match this more appropriately to national standards. Children are beginning to discuss more frequently their learning and can articulate the skills they are developing. Older children are beginning to make suggestions on how they can be successful. Children at early level are well supported by teachers to begin to use the language of learning. As a result of this work, children now talk about their learning and the progress they have made this session.

In literacy and numeracy lessons, teachers ensure they plan activities to match better the learning needs of children. Teachers should continue to develop high-quality experiences and tasks across the curriculum to ensure all children experience the appropriate level of challenge. Teachers in the mainstream now need to ensure they plan effectively for children who also spend time within the learning centre. They should draw upon the expertise of learning centre staff to ensure they can respond promptly to children's needs to ensure they are fully included and engaged in learning experiences.

Children are proud of the progress they are making in writing and keenly share this with visitors. Senior leaders and teachers now need to ensure that all children have greater opportunities to write independently, extended pieces of work to apply their skills and show what they can do without support.

Teachers have a clear focus on improving the structure of lessons. They are planning effectively a better balance of teacher instruction and explanation as well as pupil discussions. Children's engagement and focus on their learning has improved as a result. Teachers work effectively as a team and are beginning to share practice to support all children to experience higher quality learning and teaching. Teachers are now in a stronger place to take greater responsibility for developing the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

LC staff have introduced a number of interventions which are allowing them to improve the learning and teaching for children with more severe and complex needs. Staff have also been trained to de-escalate challenging situations to keep children and staff safe.

LC staff have also visited other LC establishments within the authority to observe and learn from other. They now attend termly meetings of staff from all of the local authority LCs to discuss common issues and network with each other. These activities are supporting improvements in the learning centre.

LC staff have been able to access some of the school's PEF allocation and have used this well to improve learning, teaching and assessment. They have been able to use this funding to implement an online tracking and monitoring system which is better suited to the profile of children with additional support needs. It successfully enables staff to track and monitor progress as well as identifying next steps for children. This is enabling staff to support children through specific, appropriate targeted interventions, approaches to classroom practice and the use of a wider range of resources.

LC staff have revised Individual educational plans (IEPs) so that they are more meaningful for children and their families. Families are encouraged to comment on IEPs. A next step for LC staff is to involve children more in these discussions. Long term and short-term targets are now appropriately specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed (SMART).

Staff in the centre are more collaborative in their approach. They work well together and take a more solution focussed approach to better meet the needs of children. They plan together to ensure that children experience learning which is more relevant, motivating and better matched to their needs. As a result, children in class are happy, engaged and enthusiastic about their learning.

Staff should improve approaches to planning across the curriculum to ensure all children in the school and learning centre receive depth, breadth and progression in their learning. They should improve approaches to planning for children who require additional support with their learning.

Although there has been some progress in addressing this area for development, staff need more time to develop this work more fully.

Teachers continue to make effective use of progression pathways in literacy, numeracy and physical education to plan children's learning. These pathways provide teachers with clear and helpful guidance on the skills children should be capable of learning as they move through a level. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that all teachers use these pathways effectively to plan appropriate learning for children in literacy and numeracy. Teachers should continue to develop how they support all children to identify their progress and next steps for learning accurately. This should help children to have greater ownership of their learning. Teachers have developed planners that make links across different curricular areas. This is at the early stages of implementation. In reviewing these plans, teachers should now ensure there is depth to children's learning. Teachers should also reflect on how they enhance the topic-based learning children already receive. This includes looking at the local and surrounding area to plan more effectively for learning. This will support children to have a better understanding of how they can contribute positively to their community.

Children are now learning digital skills more progressively. This is impacting positively on ensuring children experience more appropriate learning across a wider and better planned range of contexts. Teachers are now more able to plan learning that builds on and extends children's prior learning. The school has been awarded national accreditation for their work in this area.

Staff and children should continue to engage with the community and use the environment to enhance learning. Children are very proud and are able to talk confidently about the history of the local area with visitors. Teachers now use a progressive planner to help children understand the wider range of skills they develop such as creativity and communication.

Senior leaders and staff should ensure that a progressive, relevant programme of learning for health and wellbeing is established. Teachers should now develop context specific health and wellbeing plans to provide children with appropriate learning to manage the big issues and challenges they may face.

LC staff have been broadening the curriculum for children with more severe and complex needs. For example, they are visiting a local café, 'The Airts,' to give children the opportunity to gain some basic work experience. This is also giving them an insight into the topic 'people who help us' on a local basis. Other experiences include the use of the school's hydro pool, Forest School activities and play therapy. All of these experiences are enriching learning activities for children.

LC staff have developed three year rolling plans covering the early level CfE experiences and outcomes and the milestones. This is helping teachers to ensure that they are organising appropriate coverage of the curriculum for all learners.

The curriculum is being made more accessible to children in the LC by the developing use of symbols and signing in lessons. Staff make some use of alternative augmentative communication devices in the LC classes, but this could be extended to support children to improve their communication.

The Learning Centre is becoming an identified part of the school community. Children are performing with their peers at Christmas shows and attend services and assemblies as appropriate. LC staff acknowledge that a next step for them is to give children better access to classes with their peers.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Dumfries and Galloway Council regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within one year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with Dumfries and Galloway Council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Teri McIntosh
HM Inspector