

28 August 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

Springvale School, Ellon

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited and inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents, children and young people and we worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children and young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports them 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 lesson drop-in weeks, pupil voice and leadership, school ethos and relationships and the staff's use of tracking and monitoring information to set targets for learners. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's and young people's education.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Children and young people learn in a caring, positive environment. Almost all enjoy school and are keen to learn. During lessons, they settle quickly and work diligently. Relationships within this strong Christian community are characterised by mutual respect and high expectations. As a result, staff and pupils work very well together and children and young people make good progress in their learning and achievement. Many children and young people have significant skills in music and art. They sing and play music together regularly and increase their confidence through performing at school and community events. They demonstrate high levels of skill and motivation in design and technology and in cookery classes. The school celebrates children's achievements well through the House points system and the Springvale newsletter produced by senior pupils. Children and young people achieve success competing against each other during physical education and through sports events with a partner school. There is scope to extend children and young people's leadership skills further through, for example, school committees and extra-curricular activities.

Almost all children in P3 to P6 are making appropriate progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Children with additional support needs are making very good progress towards their learning targets. Across all primary classes, children use their literacy and numeracy skills well in learning about history, geography and science. They produce interesting reports and creative stories. A few demonstrate very strong writing skills. Children think creatively to solve number problems using a range of strategies. They have an appropriate grasp of how to work with money and

time. In the secondary classes, most young people achieve well in national examinations at GCSE and AS and A2 level. Through increasingly active approaches to learning and teaching, they are developing a wide range of skills for learning, work and life. Young people interact confidently with each other and with staff to discuss issues relating to politics and current affairs. They use historical sources well to interpret the past. They speak in French with confidence and link aspects of their learning such as mathematics and science in ways which deepen their understanding of the world. Across the school, children and young people are increasingly aware of the importance of living a safe and healthy lifestyle and how to achieve this through physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

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

Teachers know children and young people very well. In almost all lessons, they adapt tasks and activities to take appropriate account of children and young people's varying needs and abilities. Children and young people with specific learning needs are well supported by class teachers and learning assistants. Staff seek advice from the Focus Learning Trust and from local professional agencies to ensure individualised educational plans have suitable targets which children and parents help to review. The current system of moving children into secondary school at the end of P6 needs to be reviewed. It does not support young people well enough to consolidate important skills before moving into the secondary stage.

The school curriculum provides a broad and balanced education from P3 to Yr 11 with increasing specialism for young people in Yr 12 and Yr 13. Staff, trustees and parents ensure resources and programmes reflect the faith and values of the Brethren community. This includes appropriate opportunities to learn beyond the classroom and to learn from visitors to the school. In the primary stages, staff enhance the given Focus Learning Trust curriculum using the aims and principles of Curriculum for Excellence to make learning exciting and relevant within a Scottish context. In the secondary school stages most learning is challenging and enjoyable. Distance learning is currently working well in a few subjects for a small number of young people. Any further development of video-conference learning and other proposed changes in the curriculum should be monitored closely to ensure young people's entitlements to direct, high quality teaching and interaction are maintained. The school's partnership with a local sports centre supports well the delivery of regular high quality physical education for secondary classes. Recent improvements in tracking and monitoring progress ensure most young people are on the right learning pathway and achieve success.

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

The recently appointed headteacher sets high standards for the school which are supported by all members of the school community. He has improved the rigour of quality assurance. Staff are encouraged to work more closely together to discuss how they can continue to improve the quality of their work. The lesson drop-in sessions are a good start to increasing staff self-reflection. There is scope to further strengthen approaches to evaluating the work of the school through involving all staff in rigorous quality assurance and school improvement planning. The headteacher

and principal teacher have a strong vision for developing the all-through nature of the school to which staff have begun to respond. All staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to children and young people who, themselves, are a credit to the community. However, all staff now need to be more fully involved by the Board of Trustees in making decisions about plans for future curriculum development. Building on the positive climate for learning and the many strengths which currently exist in the school, the headteacher and his staff require continued support for their professional expertise from the Board of Trustees. As the school moves through a period of significant change, effective communication and strong teamwork will be essential.

This inspection of your school found the following key strengths.

- Children and young people who are polite, welcoming and hardworking.
- The caring, Christian ethos, demonstrated in positive relationships and mutual respect.
- Children and young people's accomplishments in music, art, and craft and design.
- The quality of teachers' planning to meet the needs of all children and young people.

We discussed with staff and the Board of Trustees how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Review primary to secondary transition arrangements to ensure all young people make appropriate steady progress in their learning.
- Increase leadership opportunities to enable children and young people greater involvement in making improvements in the school.
- Develop a clear strategy for self-evaluation to ensure improvements focus on delivering high quality teaching and learning within the Scottish context and in line with the Focus Learning Trust curriculum model.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision at Springvale School. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes have started to lead to improvements. With school staff and the Board of Trustees working closely together, the school can continue making the necessary improvements in the quality of education provided. The school and the Board of Trustees will inform parents about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its school. Our link inspector will maintain contact with the school to support and monitor improvements.

Patricia Watson
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/SpringvaleEducationalTrustAberdeenshire.asp>.

Please contact us if you want to know how to get the report in a different format, for example, in a translation. You can contact us at enquiries@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us at BMCT, Education Scotland, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Almondvale Way, Livingston EH54 6GA.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact 01506 600200, or write to us at the above address or e-mail: feedback@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk.

Quality indicators help schools, board of governors and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the publication *How good is our school?*¹.

Here are the evaluations for Springvale School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners' experiences	good
Meeting learning needs	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	satisfactory
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory

A copy of the full letter is available on the Education Scotland website www.educationscotland.gov.uk or by clicking this link <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/SpringvaleEducationalTrustAberdeenshire.asp>.

¹ *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence: part 3*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/HowgoodisourschoolJtEpart3_tcm4-684258.pdf

17 January 2012

Dear Parent/Carer

Oakwood School, Laurieston, Falkirk

HM Inspectors recently visited Oakwood School. The visit was part of our professional engagement approach with independent schools. Professional engagement visits complement the general programme of inspections. The approach allows us to maintain our knowledge of schools in the independent sector throughout Scotland, and to work with them in bringing about continued improvement in meeting the needs of all learners. It also provides assurance to parents on the school's capacity for evaluating its own work and making improvements which have a direct impact on the quality of experiences for its young people. Our visit was based firmly on the school's self-evaluation and the priorities identified for school improvement. Following our initial discussion with the headteacher, we agreed to focus our visit on key aspects of the school's continued development. These included:

- the extent to which children and young people take responsibility for their learning and contribute to school improvement;
- approaches to supporting and challenging learners with varying needs and abilities; and
- opportunities for young people to have personalisation and choice within the senior curriculum.

During our visit, we talked to staff, young people and trustees of the school and worked with the headteacher and senior leadership staff to consider the school's improvement priorities and planned future developments. This letter sets out what we found.

How does the school ensure consistently high standards for all?

We found that the school has in place appropriate arrangements to ensure all children and young people enjoy school and achieve well. The school seeks to provide a high standard of education within a strong Christian ethos. Important values of self-discipline, respect, tolerance and working hard are at the heart of this school community. We found the school encourages learners to achieve their best in national examinations whilst developing confidence and skills for their future lives. Staff set high expectations and young people respond well to these and, as a result, are motivated and engaged in their learning. They have opportunities to achieve success and develop leadership, organisation and communication skills within the school and also through involvement in activities outside the classroom. Young people appreciate that their efforts and achievements are recognised and praised during school assemblies and in classes.

¹ This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.

In the junior school, staff approaches to developing Curriculum for Excellence are having a positive impact on their planning for learning within relevant themes and contexts which draw a number of curriculum areas together. Throughout the whole school, young people's opportunities to apply literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills are evident. For example, they spoke very well about how their involvement in the recent farm business project had deepened their understanding through this practical experience. In the senior school, the school's curriculum developments in recent years have resulted in well-structured courses leading to a range of academic and vocational qualifications. Staff have increased opportunities for young people to choose what they study. Effective tracking systems allow staff to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of learners. As a result, young people feel appropriately challenged to reach their potential.

The school works in partnership with other agencies, to ensure learners with additional needs are identified and supported. Support for learning staff work closely with class teachers, parents and young people to set and review individual learning targets. However, young people's varying needs and abilities are not always met consistently across all lessons and classes. This needs continued focus in the school's procedures for professional development for staff and monitoring learning experiences. The transition curriculum for children in Year 7 is well planned to give them an introduction to senior school whilst maintaining high levels of support from a class teacher who knows them well. The school's policies and aims promote the importance of living a safe and healthy lifestyle. Children and young people feel well cared for. The school has clear arrangements to safeguard children and young people.

How does the school continue to improve?

With strong support from trustees and the wider Brethren community, the school has increased the roll and extended the curriculum in recent years. A culture of reflection and commitment to continual improvement is evident. Staff share ideas and seek opportunities to extend the range of skills they can offer learners. The school community values the work of the professional leadership team. Our discussions with the headteacher and depute headteachers show that they understand the school's strengths and needs well. The school improvement plan contains appropriate priorities which have been set in partnership with staff, parents and learners. As the school moves forward as part of the One School network, it is important to ensure these priorities are kept to the fore.

We discussed and agreed with staff those areas on which they might focus in continuing to improve the school. These included:

- Continue to build on recent positive curriculum developments to ensure senior students have a broad and personalised programme of learning and personal development.
- Monitor approaches to support for learning to ensure class teachers and specialist staff meet the needs effectively of all learners.
- Trustees and professional staff now need to work together to plan next steps for the school which take account of the aims of the school and maintain the expectations and entitlements for all learners within the Scottish context.

We are confident that, with school staff and the Board of Trustees working closely together, the school can improve its arrangements and procedures for ensuring continued improvement in the quality of education provided. The school and the Board of Trustees will inform parents about the school's progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its school. Our lead inspector and link inspector will maintain contact with the school to support and monitor improvements.

Patricia Watson
HM Inspector
17 January 2012

Additional information about the visit can be obtained from the school.