

From mountain to sea

MEETHILL SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT MONDAY 4 MARCH 2024

Overview

Meethill School is a non-denominational school with a role of 244. The school serves Meethill catchment area in Peterhead. Meethill Primary School, which opened in 1973, is situated in the town of Peterhead, approximately 30 miles from Aberdeen. The accommodation includes the main school building and a separate custom built Early Learning Center. Meethill ELC offers 1140 hours full year-round. The current school roll stands at 237, with 193 pupils in the school and 44 in the nursery. On leaving Meethill Primary School the pupils transfer to Peterhead Academy. Meethill School is part of the Peterhead Children's Support Network and works closely with the other 10 schools in the Network. The school has a very supportive Parent Council and associated subgroup. These groups support school improvement activities and raise additional funds to support pupils in their learning. During the Quality Improvement Visit in May 2023 it was reported that Meethill ELC is a real strength and important continuity across the early level. Feedback evidenced a strength in what is being facilitated for children in relation to play based and pupil led learning and that the ELC are planning carefully to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum, whilst realising the ambition, and responding to pupil needs and interests to shape learning opportunities.

The following is a report response as requested by Education Scotland to update the progress made within Meethill School and Early Learning Center since the 2019 inspection.

Inspection timeline

Meethill School was originally inspected in November 2019 with the report published in February 2020. The key strengths from the report were:

- The nurturing and supportive relationships across the school and nursery leading to children's readiness to learn.
- The staff team across the school and nursery who work well together and are ready to develop their skills and knowledge to improve learning experiences.
- In the nursery setting, practitioners use the outdoor environment to skillfully support children to be creative, curious and confident.

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The following areas for improvement were identified and discussed with the school management team and Aberdeenshire Council.

1. Improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff should establish a clear strategy to raise attainment and achievement for all children across the school and nursery class which increases expectations of standards and progression in learning.
2. Work as a team to ensure all children experience high quality learning and teaching.
3. Staff should ensure all children have increased opportunities to lead their own learning and be more involved in evaluating their own progress.

Following school inspection in 2019, Education Scotland determined to revisit the school within 12 months. A visit took place in November 2021 which recognized the challenges faced as a result of COVID-19 however it was felt more time was required to take forward the recommendations from the original inspection. A second follow up visit was conducted in January 2023. This visit recognised the progress that had been made since the original inspection. Education Scotland then made the decision to write to the local authority within 12 months requesting a progress report. This will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding any further engagement.

Update on Progress around the 3 key areas noted above:

Priority 1

Improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff should establish a clear strategy to raise attainment and achievement for all children across the school and nursery class which increases expectations of standards and progression in learning.

The attainment over time for the school is improving. We have planned progressions for literacy and numeracy that have been in place from August 2021. From there they have been reviewed and updated accordingly. Through tracking and monitoring meetings pupils are discussed on an individual basis leading to any interventions being planned for as appropriate – this is in relation to attainment, achievement and health and wellbeing. All staff are clear on processes in relation to tracking, monitoring and reporting. Universal supports are in place in classes and targeted support is planned for as appropriate. Any targeted supports are reviewed 6 weekly for impact.

Reading

The majority of pupils are on track in reading in current P1, P4 and P7 (2023 – 2024).

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Attainment over time shows an increase for the same cohort from P1 to P4 and P4 to P7.

33% increase from P1 to P4 for same cohort (2018-19 to 2021-22)

16% increase from P4 to P7 for same cohort (2018-19 to 2021-22)

To improve attainment in reading we have undertaken:

- Agreed progression frameworks in line with national expectation
- Refurbished school library and Pupil Library Squad to promote reading across the school
- Free reading is encouraged in all classes. Teachers read to pupils. The school celebrates World Book day.
- Whole school undertaken CPD in Higher Order Reading Strategies and implemented in P1 and P2 initially.
- Phonological awareness assessments used in ELC and P1 to inform next steps and planning.
- P3 and P7 daily partner reading. P7's trained to support specific targets for P3 pupils.
- ASL teacher conducts Dyslexia screening from P4 upwards, and pupils access the Nessy support programme. Some children have access to electronic reader pens.
- Staff moderation of reading planning across school.
- Use of PiRA assessments whole school to track individual pupil progression and target interventions.
- Pupil focus groups by SLT to ensure consistency across school.

Listening and Talking

Majority of pupils in current P1, P4 and P7 are on track in listening and talking (2023 – 2024).

When considering attainment over time, there is an increase of 10% from P1 to P4 for the same cohort. There is an improvement of 11% from P4 to P7 for the same cohort (2018-19 to 2021-22). As previously mentioned, planning progressions have been reviewed and are in line with national benchmarking data.

Writing

The majority of pupils in current P1, P4 and P7 are on track in writing (2023 – 2024).

When considering attainment over time, there is an increase of 25% for the same cohort from P1 to P4 (2018-19 to 2021-22).

For P4 to P7, there is an increase of 12% for the same cohort from P4 to P7 (2018-19 to 2021-22).

To improve attainment in writing we have undertaken:

- Agreed progression frameworks in line with national expectation.
- Writing policy created and implemented.
- Assessment grids for supporting assessing and planning.

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- Pupil target grids and widget grids to support pupils to talk about their learning and targets.
- School and Cluster moderation activities.
- ASL teacher directly supports writing lessons across some classes.
- Free writing is encouraged across all classes.
- ASL teacher conducts single word reading diagnostic assessments on target pupils.

Numeracy

Most pupils are on track in the current P1 and P4. The majority of pupils are on track in the current P7 (2023 – 2024).

When considering attainment over time there is a decrease from P1 to P4 of 9% (2018-19 to 2021-22). 78% of this cohort of pupils has a recorded level of additional need, with 32% of them with an assessed diagnosis. This group was significantly affected by COVID interrupted learning. That said, their November 23 data shows an increase in level of attainment with an end of session predicted level of most being on track.

When considering attainment over time there is an increase of 17% for the same cohort from P4 to P7.

To improve attainment in numeracy we have undertaken:

- PUMA assessment whole school to target interventions.
- Whole school expectations of daily mental math's lessons.

July 2023 Data

23% of P1 pupils are in receipt of Free School Meals. All of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, most in writing and all in numeracy.

38% of P1 pupils have an identified ASN level. The majority of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading and writing with most achieving in numeracy.

8% of P1 pupils are EAL. The majority of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

P1 SIMD (all pupils are in SIMD 4, 5 and 8). Most of the P1 pupils in these SIMD are achieving appropriately in literacy and numeracy. One pupil in SIMD 2 is achieving appropriately in all areas.

23% of P4 pupils are in receipt of Free school meals. Less than half of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

63% of P4 pupils have an identified ASN level. The majority of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

20% of P4 pupils are EAL. The majority of these pupils are achieving in reading, writing and numeracy.

Almost all children are in SIMD 4, 5 and 8. Most of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

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42% of P7 pupils are in receipt of Free school meals. The majority of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

6% of P7 pupils are EAL. The majority of these pupils are achieving in reading, writing and numeracy.

54% of P7 pupils have an identified ASN level. Less than half of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

Almost all pupils in P7 are in SIMD 4 and 8. The majority of these pupils are achieving appropriately in reading, writing and numeracy.

Health and wellbeing is supported through the use of an updated progression, the use of the Glasgow Wellbeing Tool, class daily check ins, PEF funded Pupil Support Worker and various Nurture activities. These are supported by our Nurture teacher for pupils considered most in need of additional support. Moderation activities are built into the QA calendar consisting of termly moderation activities and Cluster moderation activities.

In house, Cluster and National moderation activities have proved very useful. Staff commented:

“The moderation activities we have been part of have helped develop new professional relationships which in turn through professional discussion has led to an improvement in my pedagogy.”

This has led to an increased range of techniques being employed by staff to assess children’s progress, resulting in more robust teacher judgement and the identification of more appropriate and supportive next steps. Staff commented:

“I now feel more confident in my professional judgement of achievement of a level and the evidence I need to back this up.”

In the ELC, all staff contribute to intentional planning and facilitate child led planning, to ensure that there is a consistent approach, across the ELC team to the planning and delivery of high-quality learning and teaching experiences. A key worker system is in place and key workers deliver planned teaching and learning experiences to their key worker children, ensuring the experiences are age and stage appropriate, provide appropriate support and challenge and take into consideration the children’s interests. There is ongoing professional dialogue across the team to both reflect on the planned learning experiences and share feedback from observations (formal and informal) of children to inform responsive planning, ensuring children’s voices and needs are underpinning responsive planning.

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Priority 2

Work as a team to ensure all children experience high quality learning and teaching.

Extensive staff consultation has taken place, enabling staff to fully discuss the importance of strong collegiate working, home school team working and a sense of belonging. This has resulted in positive changes taking place including:

- an updated collegiate calendar that staff feel is much more focused and productive therefore positively impacting on learners and their attainment.
- opportunities for staff to work to their strengths, sharing their enthusiasm, skills and expertise with the creation of new working groups. This has led to improvements in Meethill's learning teaching and assessment practices which in turn impacts positively on pupils' assessment, self-evaluation and target setting.

Peer observations, peer planning and peer support is beginning to be embedded in line with school improvement plan priorities and the collegiate calendar. This has resulted in an increase in confidence in staff to have open and honest discussions positively impacting high quality learning and teaching. This is evidenced in staff comments:

“There is a lot more positive collaboration between staff, this has resulted in more robust teacher judgement as well as planning more effectively for high quality learning and teaching.”

“As stage partners, with the new processes in place we work much more effectively, leading to a positive school ethos where continued improvement is a priority.”

Collaborative working from staff across the early level has directly impacted on pupils as evidenced in Meethill Inspection report March 2023:

“Staff working across the early level in the nursery and school have worked together successfully to provide rich opportunities for children to learn through play.”

Following the Education Scotland report from March 2023, a refined program of staff professional development was introduced (focusing mainly on literacy and health and wellbeing). This was well received by staff and is positively impacting on learners by identifying and supporting pupil mental health, as well as raising attainment in literacy. High quality teaching non negotiables identified in 2020, are fully embedded and continue to be a daily focus. This has improved pedagogy, creating a consistent understanding of lesson structure, pace and challenge. Pupils have fed back that this has developed their skills in self-reflection as they are more aware of targets and next steps and are therefore more motivated to achieve their goals.

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“Having a target makes me feel better, I know if I’m getting it right or if I need to get better at it”

“If you know that there is something you need to work on it motivates you to keep going”

To strengthen stakeholder working, a newly reconstituted Pupil Council and Parent Council was formed, which has resulted in a higher attendance of parents at meetings allowing for a more impactful parental voice. Consultation takes place around school improvement, school evaluation and participatory budgeting. This has resulted in a consultative school improvement plan, joint financial decisions and an improved sense of community involvement and belonging. Comment from a pupil council member stated:

“I take my role on pupil council seriously to help make improvements in the school.”

The creation of a school social media platform allows pupils to share their learning as well as successes with the wider community. In addition, the Pupil Council has been instrumental in increased community involvement, providing a new school library which is supporting attainment in literacy. This newly refurbished library, fabricated through monetary donations from local businesses, led to a prestigious opening involving our wider community, parents and pupils. Deputy Provost who attended the opening commented:

“It was a very well organised event and the library is a great resource for the children. I was impressed that the children were completely involved in the project.”

In the ELC, the learning environments are set up to promote independence, with independent access to loose parts and real-life resources available to promote children’s natural curiosity and enquiry skills. A ‘workshop style’ environment ensures children have free choice of how they direct their learning. Provocations and invitations to learn are used in the environment to encourage children to engage in learning and practitioners facilitate the learning process by scaffolding discussions with children which enable them to reflect on their learning and consider their individual next steps. Children’s voice is acknowledged and recorded throughout the setting, on a variety of wall displays and mind maps, which are used to document children’s learning experiences. The majority of children are able to reflect on these and can talk about their learning.

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Priority 3

Improve all children's opportunities to lead their own learning and be more involved in evaluating their own attainment and achievement progress and school experiences.

Pupil consultation and opportunities for pupil voice are becoming embedded in classroom and school practice through more creative learning opportunities and IDL. This has resulted in increased opportunities for children to lead their learning, take ownership and has increased pupil engagement.

Pupils have commented:

"I have more choice in my learning which makes me more interested in my jobs"

"In my Construction Meet Up group we all get to share our ideas for activities. When it was my idea that was used I felt proud. We always get an extra challenge which makes us think."

Following well received staff CLPL on children's voice, UNCRC and learner participation, progress is evident in this area. For example, improved pupil peer relations across the school and a higher level of engagement and empowerment leading to an increase in achievement and attainment. A range of opportunities are in place for children to take ownership and direct their learning and skills development. Meethill Meet Ups provide opportunities for children across all stages to learn together within a context of their choice. An analysis of wider achievement identified a significant number of children who did not have opportunities for wider experiences. To address this, Meethill Meet Ups were put in place for children to have fun whilst learning through choice, develop new skills and be able to share these with others. Positive feedback has been received from pupils, teaching staff and PSA's. Such as:

"It has been really fun working with new people. We have improved lots of skills such as problem solving, team-work and leadership"

"The Kindness Meet Up have enjoyed being kind and helping people. We have loved working with other people, supporting each other and spreading kindness in the community by going to a care home and giving out flowers to our school community neighbours. We have also shown our creativity and worked on our communication skills"

"A really positive session working with my Meet Up group. Children were all engaged in the activities throughout. Older pupils were taking responsibility, challenging themselves and enjoying connecting with their peers from across the stages. All children were happy, productive and looking forward to the next time".

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Increased responsibility to organise and run house events has led to better curricular engagement in P7 and has ensured children extend their skills for learning life and work. This has impacted the whole school with an improved community feel and ethos.

“I liked working in a team with my peers supported by the teachers. We have improved lots of skills such as problem solving, team work and leadership”.

The new tracking and monitoring process to identify children on the cusp of attaining, enables children and parents to be fully involved in the next steps to support their learning.

“My teacher talked to me about my work and we agreed targets for me to work on to improve my levels. I knew exactly what I had to do and I got extra help.”

An increased focus has been placed on wider achievements enabling children and parents to share experiences, celebrate success and have their achievements acknowledged. All staff agreed that changes in pedagogy, particularly in reading, has provided children with increased choice and challenge, empowering them to shape their learning according to their needs and interests. Once this is fully embedded staff plan to extend the ethos underpinning this pedagogy across the curriculum. An increased awareness and focus on skills is evident with children able to identify the skills they are working on. Work is continuing in classes to involve children in co constructing success criteria with self-evaluation and peer evaluation opportunities evident in most classes. This has resulted in children being more positive about their learning, expressing enjoyment and motivation.

“Sometimes I challenge myself to do the strategy that I don’t really like and I’m pleased when it works.”

In the ELC, over the last 3 years, the planning cycle has evolved. Through continuous review and evaluation, a robust planning system has been developed which ensures breadth, depth and curriculum coverage through a balance of child led learning and intentional planning. The planning, tracking and monitoring is supported by the use of curricular progressions, the benchmarks and developmental overviews. Children’s attainment and progress is recorded through formal planning and tracking meetings.

Next steps:

Along with central officers the following priorities have been agreed to ensure continued progress within Meethill:

- Continue to promote high expectations and embed high quality learning, teaching and assessment.
- Begin to implement the CIRCLE Framework to support and enhance inclusive practice in Meethill.

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- In line with Authority direction, the Head Teacher will engage with Self Improving Schools partnerships with a Trio of Headteachers. These trios will lead to strong collaborative working within an ethos of support and challenge.
- Continue to embed practices within reading pedagogy and extend the underpinning pedagogy across other curricular areas.
- Across the school and ELC, ensure that learning teaching and assessment, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy, remain a focus for improvement planning to ensure continuous progress.

Overall

Meethill staff would agree that this learning journey has been challenging however, with constructive changes now being seen and significant improvements evident, staff state that this has been a positive journey. Good will is evident with staff eager to continue school improvement, identifying areas for development, enhancing practice, professional learning needs and offering increased peer supports. The interconnectedness of the school improvement plan, together with the action plan and local Authority priorities, has resulted in a sustainable school development plan that is producing positive results. This can be evidenced through improved school ethos, increased stakeholder involvement and increased attainment in the 2023 ACL data. Significant improvements have taken place in all three priority areas with school staff confident they have the capacity for continued improvement.

Summary

All staff at Meethill have engaged very well with the Areas for Improvement clearly outlined by Colleagues from Education Scotland during their visits to the school. This engagement has been effectively supported by a number of central officers from both Early Years and the School team within our Education and children's Service team. While the journey to improve the areas identified during inspection has been challenging it is clear that significant progress has been made across all the Areas for Improvement.

Staff at Meethill have worked closely with central officers during many and regular school visits. These school visits have been designed to allow officers to be able to visit classes, to talk to pupil groups, to speak with parents and to meaningfully engage with a variety of staff cohorts including support staff, teaching staff and the school's management team. This open engagement has resulted in the school being able to clearly identify robust evidence which they have used to construct the action plans for improvement. These action plans have been co-constructed by staff and the management team with support from central officers and central officers have met regularly with the school's SLT and with staff to discuss the progress as outlined above.

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This work has been ongoing since the original inspection and as a Service we are delighted with the improvements the school has made. It does need to be noted that the school has been without their substantive Head Teacher for the last 6 months. Unfortunately, the Head Teacher is off long term with a serious illness. The acting Head Teacher supported by an acting DHT and by all staff has done a remarkable job progressing the identified improvements. In addition to this the school is also mindful that through work with our Learning Estates team and with Education officers they are now entering into the wider programme of work around the Peterhead Campus which will see a new Campus built in the Peterhead area including the amalgamation of Meethill school with another local primary. The acting Head Teacher and her team have already begun this work and are engaging with stakeholders and designing transition programmes with the pupils.

As a Service we are very confident in the staff team at Meethill and in their ability to continue the improvement journey for the school. Officers will continue to engage with the school as appropriate and within our normal Quality Improvement processes.