

Note of Recovery Visit

Dunbar Primary School and Nursery Class East Lothian Council

About this document

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) have prepared this document following a recent visit to Dunbar Primary School and Nursery Class that they carried out along with officers from East Lothian Council. Dunbar Primary School and Nursery Class self-selected for a recovery visit, which was arranged to meet the needs of their individual circumstances.

Activities undertaken during the visit were discussed in advance with the head of establishment and with local authority officers. Taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic, some activities have been carried out remotely.

- The Note of Recovery Visit is provided for use by the school and local authority. It is designed to support improvement and careful thought should be given to how it is shared.
- The Note of Recovery Visit is not intended to be distributed widely. Headteachers and local authority officers should use their judgement in sharing particular sections of the document, confidentially, with others as appropriate to their areas of responsibility and interests.

About our visit

HM Inspectors invited schools and settings to talk about their current priorities as they respond to the impact of the pandemic.

We focused on the following three areas:

- continuity of learning;
- wellbeing of children, young people and staff; and
- safeguarding and Child Protection.

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| Date(s) of visit | 16 May 2022 – 18 May 2022 |
| Lead Inspector | Susie Smith |

Key contextual information

Dunbar Primary School is situated on a split campus site, close to the centre of Dunbar. The John Muir Campus houses the nursery class and P1 to P3. It also houses The Cove, a communication provision, currently supporting 27 children. The nursery class is registered to provide early learning and childcare (ELC) for 144 children age two years and above. Currently there are no children under the age of three. One of the depute headteachers has overall responsibility for the nursery class. A centre manager leads the nursery on a day-to-day basis and each individual playroom has a senior early years practitioner. The centre manager also has responsibility for another ELC setting within the local authority. There are five playrooms, which

operate independently across two buildings. All playrooms have their own outdoor area. The setting has operated 48 weeks per year since the implementation of 1140 hours of ELC. All children attend for two full days and alternate Fridays.

Twenty P4 to P7 classes are situated at the Lochend Campus which is a 15 minute walk from the John Muir Campus. There are 160 staff working across both sites. The headteacher is supported by six deputy headteachers and five principal teachers. The current school roll is 1,237.

The school is very much at the heart of the local community. Prior to the pandemic, staff welcomed a large number of volunteers into the school to support a range of different activities and learning experiences. The school had strong community links which supported children's learning and wider achievement. All stakeholders are keen to see these links with families and the wider community reinstated as COVID-19 restrictions ease.

1. Continuity of learning

Staff across each primary stage have regular opportunities to plan together. This well-established practice enabled staff to share workload and utilise areas of expertise during periods of remote learning. This partnership working supports consistency and progression across year groups and provides opportunities for moderation. Part-time teachers provide supply cover in their non-working days. This, along with the partnership working approach, helps to maintain continuity of learning for children during periods of staff absence.

Staff assessed fully where children were in their learning at the start of this session. They considered carefully when best to undertake the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA). As a result, staff are better informed about how to support children in their learning. Senior leaders identify that the attainment of children at P3 has been most affected by the pandemic. They have put appropriate measures in place to address this. Staff across the nursery and P1 report an increase in the number of children who require additional support with communication and language skills. The headteacher uses pupil equity funding (PEF) to secure access to a visiting speech and language therapist who provides both universal and targeted support for children. The approach also builds the capacity of staff as they learn a range of techniques and strategies to support children during play.

Teachers used assessment evidence to identify the need to improve writing across all stages. They are participating in a three-year writing programme with other local schools. Staff now take a more structured approach to teaching writing and use research projects to evaluate how effective approaches are. Children feel their writing skills are improving.

Each senior leader has responsibility for a specific year group. Their strategic understanding of children's progress and curriculum delivery at each stage helps identify gaps in learning across curriculum areas. They use this information to ensure continuity in learning for children at the end of each academic year. Staff use information about children's progress effectively to identify learners in need of support and challenge.

Staff make use of local authority curriculum frameworks and ensure children receive their entitlement to a broad curriculum. The use of a play-based approach to learning in P1 is having a positive impact on children's learning and progress. We discussed with senior leaders how

teachers could use observation to support assessment in P1. We also explored possible approaches to support a shared understanding of progress between staff working across early level. Expansive school grounds provide a rich variety of learning environments. There is potential to develop their use further to provide planned, progressive outdoor learning opportunities.

In the nursery, most children engage well during indoor and outdoor play. Practitioners monitor closely the range of experiences provided for children. This helps ensure breadth of opportunities across the curriculum. Practitioners continue to develop their skills in observing and recording children's learning. They use effective approaches to record children's achievements. This information identifies where there may be gaps in learning. Practitioners use this information effectively to support both responsive and intentional planning for children's learning. They may find it helpful to revisit national guidance and access resources on the National Improvement Hub. This could support reflection, deepen knowledge and improve further consistency of practice.

In The Cove, teachers understand the needs of learners and use this knowledge well to support children to engage with their learning. All children returned successfully to full-time learning in school following the lockdown. While COVID-19 restrictions were in place, children were unable to access valuable learning activities in the local community. As mitigations ease, staff work well to offer most children a wider range of learning experiences. Aided by community partners, they offer children a breadth of activities that improve wellbeing and develop skills for life, learning and work. These include swimming, climbing and visits to the local library. Teachers in The Cove now need to work more closely with colleagues in the wider school. They should plan jointly more lessons which allow children in The Cove to engage in learning activities alongside their mainstream peers.

2. Wellbeing of children, young people and staff

Across the school and nursery, there is a calm and caring ethos. Staff know children well and understand clearly their health and wellbeing needs. Staff recognised the need to focus on wellbeing in response to the pandemic. They prioritise nurturing approaches as part of the universal support for children's wellbeing. A whole-school approach to understanding emotions helps children to talk confidently about their feelings and develop strategies to deal with these effectively.

The school values, and a focus on children's rights, support learners to feel valued and respected. Children know they can talk to adults in school and are confident they will be listened to and supported. Staff are vigilant in identifying individuals who may require support with their wellbeing. They raise concerns promptly with senior leaders and agree appropriate strategies or interventions. A wide range of partners provide effective, targeted support to reduce anxiety, build confidence and promote children's mental wellbeing.

Staff encourage physical activity and promote the benefits of being outdoors. There are opportunities to celebrate diversity and promote an inclusive culture. It would be helpful to have a clear framework for the wide range of approaches, strategies and interventions in place to support children's wellbeing. This would provide staff with a coherent overview of the supports available across the school, linked to the wellbeing indicators.

The staff work very well together. They feel well supported by each other and know they can approach senior leaders with ideas, issues or concerns. There is a greater focus on supporting staff wellbeing in recognition of the ongoing challenges staff face. A range of activities and groups, such as wellbeing walks and a running group, promote physical and mental wellbeing. These opportunities are open to all staff and have strengthened further staff relationships. There is a plan to develop a coaching culture across the school to support not only professional learning, but also wellbeing.

Children in the nursery are becoming familiar with the wellbeing indicators. They have the opportunity to access a wide range of experiences to support their health and wellbeing. This includes cosy quiet spaces, sensory resources and physical equipment. Outdoors, children are particularly skilled in using wheeled toys and climbing on trees and structures created from loose parts. Children from across the five playrooms have lunch together in the school dining hall. We would suggest that practitioners continue to use self-evaluation to review the lunchtime experience. This could support practitioners to identify any changes required to ensure a positive experience for all.

Practitioners report that the move to 1140 hours of ELC and the impact of COVID-19 has been challenging. They have found the support from each other and the centre manager invaluable. The practitioner team are motivated and keen to extend their knowledge to improve further their practice and achieve consistency.

Staff in The Cove have worked successfully to install a caring culture. They place great emphasis on supporting children and families' wellbeing. Staff respond well to children's changing wellbeing needs. They have supported children effectively to overcome any anxiety or loss they are experiencing as a result of the pandemic. Most children in The Cove enjoy participating in sports and physical activity. They would benefit from more opportunities to engage in planned physical education learning activities in the school. Staff in The Cove are well supported by their colleagues and senior leaders. However, most staff in The Cove believe that the expectations placed upon them during the second lockdown had a detrimental impact upon their wellbeing. Senior leaders ensure staff are able to share any wellbeing concerns they may be experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

3. Approaches to Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures

As part of this visit, HM Inspectors explored with school/setting leaders approaches to safeguarding and child protection. We identified the following areas of effective practice/ areas for development.

The school's child protection and safeguarding policy is in line with East Lothian Council expectations. The policy takes good account of relevant legislation and guidance. Contact details for the child protection coordinators should be added to the list of key telephone numbers contained within the policy document. A hyperlink to East Lothian's child protection and safeguarding policy would also be a helpful addition.

Both the headteacher and a principal teacher have undertaken professional learning to support them to take on the role of child protection coordinator. All staff across the school and nursery undertake safeguarding and child protection e-training each school session. New staff complete mandatory training on child protection processes and procedures within four weeks of being in

post. If staff have any safeguarding concerns, they know the process to follow, including action they must take.

The headteacher and centre manager should develop a policy for staff to follow in the absence of the child protection coordinators. This is particularly in relation to accessing confidential files outwith school hours and term-time. The centre manager is in the process of updating and improving children's personal plans which include chronologies. It will be important for these plans to be organised in such a way that relevant practitioners can access information quickly and easily.

All members of the school community are aware of the child protection policy and procedures. Children and families know someone at the school they can speak to if they have any concerns. The role of the child protection coordinator is visible throughout the school and nursery. Senior leaders should provide all visitors with a succinct summary of what to do if they have any safeguarding concerns.

There has not been a marked increase in safeguarding issues at the school following the pandemic. Senior leaders have an awareness of potential safeguarding issues that could impact on children and families as a result of COVID-19. As part of continuing curriculum development, teachers should incorporate more learning activities on areas such as staying safe online and bullying.

Senior leaders closely monitor children's attendance. Almost all children are successfully maintaining 90% attendance or above. There is a clear procedure in place for highlighting and responding to any irregular or concerning patterns of non-attendance. COVID-19 has negatively affected a few learners' attendance. Senior leaders proactively identified this risk and allocate PEF to support interrupted learners.

Summary of emerging issues and/or challenges as a result of the pandemic.

Staff and parents report increased levels of anxiety in children as a result of the pandemic. In a few cases, this has led to children struggling to return to school full-time. Senior leaders work closely with families and a range of partners to support children to re-engage with the school. A pupil support worker liaises closely with children and families effectively to support identified learners' to re-engage with their education. This is having a positive impact on children's wellbeing and involvement with their learning.

Senior leaders and staff should continue to create and develop bespoke learning pathways to meet better the needs of interrupted learners. The headteacher is solution-focused in trying to identify creative approaches to motivate and re-engage children in their learning. The headteacher recognises the need to ensure all children receive their full entitlement to a broad, planned and progressive curriculum. Working closely with parents and partners, the longer term goal will be to reintegrate children fully into learning in class with their peers.

Senior leaders and parents describe the lengths staff went to, in order to support key transitions across the school. COVID-19 restrictions affected the school's usual approaches to supporting transition, especially between the two campuses. Staff used technology well to introduce children to their new teacher and to provide video tours of classrooms and shared spaces. However, transitions were challenging for children with additional support needs who would have

benefitted from the usual enhanced transition process. This has had a significant impact on their learning, as they took longer to settle into their new context.

Staff also report that children's social skills across the school have been impacted by the pandemic. This is particularly evident in younger children who have not had the usual opportunities to interact with peers as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and mitigations. Senior leaders and staff have identified the need to adapt approaches to learning to support children to develop their social and interpersonal skills.