

24 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In February 2019, HM Inspectors published a letter on Dochgarroch Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and The Highland Council. Recently, as you may know, we visited the school again. During our visit, we talked to children and worked closely with the acting headteacher and staff. We heard from the acting 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 and at other aspects of the school's work, as proposed by the acting headteacher. 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.

Continue to ensure that learning experiences are well matched to children's needs, based on effective tracking and monitoring of their progress in learning.

Since the last inspection, there have been further changes to the staff team, including the position of acting headteacher. A new acting headteacher was appointed in August 2019. Along with staff, she has made good progress in taking forward this area for improvement.

In the primary school, the acting headteacher and staff have a good understanding of children's strengths and next steps in learning. As a result, staff plan learning experiences which are well matched to children's needs. Teachers assess children's learning in different ways. Positively, they now meet termly with the acting headteacher to discuss each child's progress and to discuss and plan their next steps in learning. There is scope to extend this to include discussions about children in the nursery. Children in the primary class now have a greater understanding of their own learning and the progress they are making. The newly developed online journals are supporting this well. Children are able to identify when they have achieved success in their learning and include evidence of this within their journals. Overall, in the nursery class, practitioners have a good understanding of children's progress. They track children's progress well in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This is helping them to plan learning to ensure children are well supported and challenged. In addition, the team also identify individual learning targets for each child. Helpfully, these targets are discussed and shared with parents. Children are becoming confident discussing their own targets and the progress they are making in overtaking these.

As planned, refresh the curriculum rationale to ensure it appropriately reflects Dochgarroch Primary and its community.

The school has made a positive start in taking forward this area for improvement.

Before taking on the task of refreshing the curriculum rationale, the acting headteacher and staff revisited the school's values, vision and aims. Staff involved the whole school community in refreshing these and they are now beginning to be embedded across the school. A child friendly poster captures the new vision, values and aims in a meaningful way for children across the school.

Following the creation of the new vision, values and aims, the acting headteacher took steps to develop a relevant curriculum rationale. This takes good account of the unique context of the school, reflecting well the interesting and distinctive local area. The rationale ensures that children's outdoor learning is a regular and strong feature of their learning experiences. Children in the nursery class play a key role influencing the curriculum on offer. Currently, they are auditing outdoor learning and helping to identify what and how they will learn in the outdoor area. They are working with practitioners to plan a garden improvement event which will involve parents and the local community. The school should take forward their plans to improve the primary class children's access to physical education.

Improve learning experiences for all children in the nursery to ensure the best possible progress in their development and learning.

The acting headteacher and practitioners have made good progress in taking this area for improvement forward.

The move to a bigger classroom within the school has had a significant and positive impact on the quality of learning and teaching in the nursery class. Children are now more engaged in their learning and sustain their play better. For the most part, children enjoy positive relationships with each other. They benefit from the skilful interactions of the team to share adult attention, space and resources with each other. Children have helped to create their own nursery rules which are supporting them well and resulting in a more harmonious ethos. Practitioners promote positive behaviour well throughout the session. They have established a visual timetable to support children throughout the day. This is helping children transition smoothly from one activity to another. Helpfully, children all undertake a leadership role each day which is supporting them to be responsible. Across the day, there is a good balance between planned and free play opportunities. Practitioners have worked hard to develop a more attractive and stimulating learning environment and now provide natural and open-ended resources. There is also a significant increase in the amount of real-life resources available for children to use. Children are able to lead their play for sustained periods of time. They have regular opportunities for outdoor play in the playground and school field. Outdoors, they are developing their gross motor skills well as they run and cycle on different bikes. They show great delight making their own bubbles with different tools. Children also benefit great from their regular visits to the forest. Across the indoor and outdoor learning environments, practitioners have increased the opportunities to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills. There is scope to develop further children's skills in meaningful ways. Practitioners take good account of children's interests to plan learning. The introduction of a 'learning mascot', Donald, is helping children to talk about and review their learning. Overall, children are now making better progress in their development and learning.

What happens next?

The school has made good progress since the original inspection. We are confident that the school has the capacity to continue to improve and so we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. The Highland Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Jackie Maley
HM Inspector