

25 January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Auchtertyre Primary School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Auchtertyre. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families, have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

Staff are continuing to respond effectively to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the school continues to make good progress in taking forward improvements from the original inspection. The pace of change in a few areas of development has been more limited.

Staff, parents and children agreed that their experiences of remote learning improved over time. Staff took action to address barriers to engagement. Parents were positive about the support provided and the flexibility of staff. Staff are maintaining a strong focus on supporting literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. They are making good use of a range of information to identify learning gaps and to support children's needs.

The wellbeing of children and staff has been supported effectively by the headteacher. Staff recognise the wellbeing benefits of regular outdoor experiences for children and plan to further develop this across the school and nursery. Children can speak about how to look after their own wellbeing.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Learning and teaching is now underpinned by high-quality respectful relationships between all adults and children. There is a warm, welcoming ethos and almost all children are purposefully engaged and happy in class. High expectations of behaviour are maintained and children work well with each other in class and outdoors.

The new headteacher has established a climate of trust where all members of staff feel included, valued and have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Staff are supporting children effectively to undertake more meaningful leadership. For example, the pupil council are planning and organising the upcoming Christmas Fayre. When given the opportunity to lead, children are eager to apply their skills.

The headteacher monitors closely any incidents of bullying in school and is pleased that these have reduced significantly. Children shared that they have identified adults in school with whom they speak to if they have any concerns or worries.

The headteacher is providing clear strategic leadership and well-considered direction. Across the school, all staff are now involved in evaluating the school's successes and identifying areas for development. Senior leaders now ensure improvement priorities are informed by school self-evaluation and a range of data. The headteacher continues to increase the participation of children and parents in school improvement.

Curriculum development has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the school recognises this requires more work. Staff are in the early stages of providing a curriculum, which builds appropriately on children's knowledge, skills and understanding. Approaches to curriculum delivery continue to be developed and there are positive starts to meaningful cross-curricular learning for children. The headteacher has worked well to develop a clear overview of the school's curriculum and is eager to develop initial improvement work further. She has refreshed and enhanced staff knowledge and understanding of Curriculum for Excellence through effective professional learning sessions.

At the last inspection, digital technologies were not well developed. This was followed up with training from the local authority. Staff report this supported them to respond well to the increased challenge of teaching remotely. Technology is now increasingly being used to enrich children's learning or support the development and application of skills.

Overall, the school is making good progress in embedding strategic approaches to improve learning, teaching and assessment. The process for identifying children needing additional support continues to improve. Children in the nursery are now eager to reflect on their experiences and help plan learning through the introduction and development of floor books and individual learning profiles. Staff report changes to learning and teaching approaches are better meeting a wider range of needs in class, including those who require specialist support. Parents spoken to as part of a voluntary group were positive about the learning and support the children receive in school.

The headteacher reports that periods of remote learning and the COVID-19 pandemic response has slowed progress in the school's work to raise attainment. She is providing a clear strategic lead and staff demonstrate a better understanding of their role in maximising attainment. Evidence provided by the school shows children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is beginning to increase. More children are now reaching nationally expected levels and are making progress from prior learning. All staff recognise literacy and numeracy attainment remains an area needing improvement.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked The Highland Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress within one year of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform, parents/carers. Otherwise, The Highland Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Lisa Marie McDonnell
HM Inspector