

21 December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the inspection of Tiree High and Primary School and Sgoil Àraich¹, we said that we would ask Argyll and Bute Council to advise us of the school's continued improvements. We recently engaged in a virtual visit with staff, parents, children and the local authority. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and young people and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that work well to support children's and young people's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed progress in taking forward improvements from our original inspection with the acting executive headteacher and local authority officer.

This letter sets out what we found during our virtual visit. Staff at Tiree High and Primary School and Sgoil Àraich continue to make sound progress in addressing areas for improvement agreed with them by HM Inspectors.

Through COVID-19, the acting executive headteacher has continued to show strong leadership of improvements for children, young people and families. In doing so, he leads with a clear vision that promotes all staff as leaders and partners in change. Together with his senior leadership team, the acting executive headteacher is increasing expectations of all staff, and their role and responsibility in achieving the best for children and young people.

Staff have used technology very well to ensure children and young people learn whilst doing so from home. This is as children learn through Gaelic and English in challenging times. To develop confidence in their use of technology, staff share practice and support each other. Learners are clear of the importance to them as islanders of developing skills in technology. Additionally, the acting executive headteacher has increased access to a breadth of professional learning. Moving forward, approaches to professional learning should continue to include Gaelic Medium Education at primary and sgoil àraich stages.

The acting executive headteacher has a clear focus on ensuring learners' experiences are consistently of high quality. Children, young people and parents report greater enjoyment from learning, both in school and at home. Staff are now clearer on how to provide effective learning, teaching and assessment. They are keen to seek, share and act on feedback to improve. Staff work together regularly to review children and young people's learning and ensure high standards.

Staff used technology imaginatively to support immersion during the challenges of COVID-19. Whilst children in the sgoil àraich were learning at home, practitioners telephoned them twice a week. Children increased their confidence in talking by phone to recall their experiences. Practitioners continued to use some Gaelic during these calls. Practitioners also used technology to read stories and sing songs with groups of children, their siblings and families. Children used technology to become familiar with their P1 classroom as they prepared to move from the sgoil àraich. Commendably, most children in the sgoil àraich continued with Gaelic Medium Education in P1 this session. As practitioners return to

delivering total immersion within the sgoil àraich, they are using approaches such as singing. This is helping children hear, use and apply the language. Practitioners have devised a way of checking children's progress in understanding and talking Gaelic. This is giving them better information on which to plan immersion play.

At the secondary stages, there is a temporary pause due to staffing to a new offer to study social subjects through the medium of Gaelic. This learning is done jointly with teachers and young people at Oban High School. Importantly, it enables learners to build on local aspects. Young people are linking to what is cherished and significant to the island. We have discussed with the acting executive headteacher the importance of continuing to increase equity, learning, assessment, qualifications and awards through Gaelic.

Senior leaders have developed a more strategic approach to supporting the wellbeing of all children and young people. They have put in place processes to measure the success of their strategy and identify next steps. Staff have clearer roles and responsibilities, with wellbeing better planned throughout learning. They enjoy better relationships with their pupils. Staff used a range of approaches to communicate with families while learning was taking place from home. They advised families on approaches to improving health and wellbeing and learning. Children and young people benefited from weekly challenges and resources to support their wellbeing. Commendably more use is made of videos to share information and increase engagement with the community.

The acting executive headteacher has given a clear direction to improving the school. The parents to whom we spoke are happy that change is making a positive difference to their children. The innovative use of technology has significantly increased course options that young people may follow to prepare them for lifelong learning, life and work. Senior leaders have developed staff understanding of the need to measure the success of their practice, whilst looking beyond the school to national standards. The acting executive headteacher directs very well the work of a deputy headteacher and two principal teachers who are based in Tiree Schools. He has linked the leadership of secondary subjects at Tiree High School to principal teachers at Oban High School. These principal teachers have a regular programme of virtual and in-person engagements with teachers at Tiree schools. The local authority needs to continue to monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement.

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. They are successfully addressing the recommendations from the original inspection. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. Argyll and Bute 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.

Joan C. Esson
HM Inspector

ⁱ Sgoil Àraich is the Gaelic for early learning and childcare. This term is used for provision through Gaelic and English.