

4 December 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

In September 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Strontian 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 headteacher and staff. We heard from the 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. 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.

Improve learning, teaching and assessment across the primary stages in order to improve attainment and achievement

- The school has made good progress towards improving learning, teaching and assessment.
- Strontian Primary School continues to be a warm, friendly school where the wellbeing of children is central to day-to-day school life. The headteacher and staff have worked hard to develop a shared understanding of effective learning and teaching approaches. There are clear planning frameworks now in place that help teachers to plan learning more effectively across the multi-stage composite classes. As a result, lessons are better planned and children are engaged and motivated by their learning. The headteacher and staff have reviewed their use of national and local curriculum planning and assessment guidance. Staff now plan rich assessment tasks to ensure children have opportunities to develop and apply their learning in new and real-life contexts. Planned moderation sessions provide valuable opportunities for staff to work with colleagues in other local schools to share standards and expectations of children's attainment. The headteacher has supported the professional learning of staff very well through arranging for teachers to visit other schools to learn about and share good practice.
- Since the original inspection, there are increased opportunities for children to lead their own learning. Children talk enthusiastically about the opportunities they now have for self and peer assessment. They talk with confidence about their learning, their strengths and their next steps. They engage in regular target setting, reflection and evaluation of their own learning. Children are proud of their pupil profiles, in which they record their own achievements and successes. These are recorded using an online platform so that information can be easily shared with parents to provide opportunities for discussing their learning at home.
- Opportunities for pupil voice have improved. Children feel that their ideas are now sought, valued and acted upon. For example, children in P7 took responsibility for deciding the activities for World Book Day. Children plan and lead the various activities and games during the popular 'Epic Friday' sessions. All children are now engaged in one of three consultative groups: the eco committee, the communications group and the learning council. The communications group plan to lead an assembly on the importance of

staying safe online for all children. The eco group have produced posters and other information to inform the local community about the importance of caring for the environment and reducing litter. The learning council has implemented the 'Tuesday Chat' initiative. This is an effective and motivating mechanism to gain children's thoughts, ideas and opinions in relation to the school improvement. As a result of these improvements, children are growing in confidence as they participate in the wider life of the school. The headteacher has correctly identified that a next step is to track and monitor learners' skills and wider achievements, in order to identify any individuals at risk of missing out.

Continue to review roles, remits and practices for children who need extra help in their learning

- The school has made good progress in improving systems for identifying and assisting children who require additional support in their learning.
- The headteacher has reviewed classroom practice to ensure that the staged approach to intervention is working more effectively. Teachers are clearer about their role in meeting the needs of children requiring some extra help in their learning. Better approaches to lesson planning means that the tasks and activities set for children are more carefully differentiated. As a result, fewer children are now identified as requiring additional support for learning, as their needs are being met appropriately by the class teacher.
- Pupil support assistants provide valuable and sensitive support in a variety of ways. For example, through one-to-one assistance, group support, individual reading, writing and speech and language support. The school's educational psychologist and school nurse provide much appreciated support to the school. They each feel welcomed as part of the school's extended staff team and that staff work very well in partnership with them to support children and families.
- The headteacher has developed a useful overview of children's progress and support for learning needs across the school. This new system allows her to monitor more strategically the progress of all children in literacy and numeracy on a regular basis. Fortnightly discussions with class teachers helps the headteacher and staff to pinpoint where children may need some extra help. Teachers should continue to ensure that they plan lessons carefully to ensure high-achieving children are suitably challenged in their learning.

Prioritise strategic leadership across the school to ensure well-paced improvement and change

- The school has made very good progress in improving approaches to strategic leadership and in promoting leadership at all levels. This is leading to a brisker pace of change and better outcomes for children.
- The headteacher has taken a number of practical steps to ensure she has protected time and space to carry out her leadership responsibilities effectively. She has developed an appropriate calendar of monitoring activities to ensure key areas of school life are reviewed on a regular basis. These activities include observations of classroom practice; looking at teachers' planning and children's work; regular, focused professional dialogue

with staff; and reviewing the progress made towards priorities in the action plan, and identifying next steps. As a result, there are now methodical systems and processes in place for the headteacher and staff to evaluate the life and work of the school on an ongoing basis across the school year. The headteacher and staff now have an accurate, evidence-based view of the strengths and areas of improvement of the school.

- All members of the staff team have additional responsibilities, either linked to areas of school life, or priorities for improvement within the school's action plan. As a result, there is an ethos of collegiality amongst the staff team, and a shared vision to do the best for children and families. Over the past year, children have willingly taken on new leadership responsibilities to help the school to continue to improve. Children are benefiting from regular opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills through the life of the school, for example as lunchtime monitors. Children speak with pride about their work in committees and groups and feel that their opinions count.
- In preparation for moving to new school accommodation, the headteacher has led an effective process of consultation and community participation in choosing a new identity for Strontian Primary School. Children, parents, staff, partners and the wider local community had the opportunity to vote for the new school logo.
- Going forward, staff should continue to build on the positive progress they have made in developing effective leadership at all levels. This will help to ensure that there is capacity for continuous improvement within Strontian Primary School, as the community moves to its new setting and begins a new chapter in the life of the school.

What happens next?

Under the leadership of the headteacher, the school has made good progress since the original inspection. At the time of this further inspection, the headteacher was due to leave the school. A successor had yet to be appointed. Parents who met with inspectors were very concerned about the instability of staffing and about plans for the leadership of the school.

As a result of the uncertainty over arrangements for the replacement of the headteacher, we will ask The Highland Council for a report on the leadership arrangements within six months of the publication of this letter. We will also ask for a progress report within one year, related to areas for development noted in this letter, in order to ensure that good progress made continues to be sustained. This report will inform any decision made by Education Scotland regarding further engagement.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector