

18 January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) 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 Castlehill Primary School and Early Years Centre (EYC), we said that we would engage with the school and EYC to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Castlehill Primary School and EYC. 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 setting'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

COVID-19 has impacted on the children, staff and community of Castlehill Primary School and EYC. We heard during our visit that throughout the pandemic the leadership team, staff and children have had to adjust to periods of new ways of learning and staying connected. Virtual learning offered by staff engaged children and provided them with opportunities to stay in touch with their friends. Children and staff faced absences and periods of isolation causing interruptions in learning and uncertainty. Changes to ways of working impacted on learning experiences provided in school and EYC. This included how children experienced moving into a new class, starting EYC for the first time, or moving on to secondary school. Staff supported learners effectively through well-judged and creative responses for example, practitioners from nursery visited children outside their homes for graduation celebrations. Staff worked together effectively to celebrate milestones and support children through change in new ways. We heard from parents, children and staff about how effective leadership, teamwork and high quality relationships helped to manage the impact of COVID-19. The headteacher and her team respond quickly to parent's views and to the ideas and opinions of the children. Staff use this feedback promptly to improve and adapt their ways of working. The headteacher demonstrates strong leadership. Staff ensure that children continue to make progress and enjoy their learning despite challenging circumstances. Engagement in professional learning has helped staff support children's health and wellbeing well. This will continue to be important in supporting children through the COVID-19 recovery period.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Practitioners now use new ways to plan learning in the EYC that are appropriate and effective. The team evaluate what stage children are at in their learning through the use of well-judged new approaches. Practitioners in the EYC then plan learning to ensure learners make progress. Teachers have worked well with the leadership team to make initial improvements to their approaches to assessment. The EYC team work very well with the headteacher, and depute head of centre, to improve approaches to how they plan, assess

and track children's progress. Practitioners are focused, positive and hard working as they continue to develop their experience and confidence in implementing new ways of working. Planning for children's learning is now more responsive to children's areas of interest and what they can do. Children are more engaged in learning as a result. The team have also made important changes to the outdoor area. Older children can now move freely between the range of interesting natural spaces and the indoor playrooms. This supports children to access a wider variety of experiences and resources that better suit their stage of development and skills. Practitioners have also improved the way they observe and record the progress children make across all areas of their learning. The team's use of learning journals now provides a better overview of each child's progress. The headteacher will continue to support staff in identifying any gaps or areas that need additional support or challenge. This will help to ensure children make the very best progress they are capable of. Practitioners have improved their confidence and skills as a result of targeted professional learning. The team are reflective, and take on board feedback from self-evaluation and regular monitoring activities by the headteacher and depute head of centre. Practitioners reflect more frequently on the impact of changes made to ways of working on individual children's progress. The team work well together to increasingly improve their work.

What happens next?

The school and EYC setting have been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have impacted on the work of the school and EYC, and staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school and EYC in connection with the original inspection. East Dunbartonshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school and EYC's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Margaret Paterson
HM Inspector