

21 January 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In October 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Inveraray Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and Argyll and Bute 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. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Improve the strategic leadership of the school to ensure consistently high quality teaching and learning. The school should increase the pace of curriculum developments, and its use of digital technology to more consistently support and extend children's learning.

The strategic leadership and direction of the school has improved significantly. The local authority education officer, who led the school in the period following the initial inspection, quickly gained the trust of staff, children and parents. Through her sound judgement and clear guidance, teachers and practitioners willingly and briskly changed aspects of their practice in order to improve outcomes for children. A new headteacher took up post in June 2019. He brings a wealth of experience and leadership skills to the school. In his short time in post, he has continued to improve the school, building on the work undertaken by staff over the past year. He has an appropriate vision for the future direction of the school. Children, staff and parents alike, appreciate his open, calm and cheerful approach. Children and staff report they feel valued, listened to and empowered to lead and initiate change as a result of his supportive leadership style. Parents are very positive about the many changes and improvements to the school since the initial inspection. They are keen that there is a continuing period of stability in the leadership of the school.

The headteacher and principal teacher encourage staff across the early level class and primary stages to use research to improving practice in learning, teaching and assessment. Recently, teachers and practitioners have shared practice and engaged in professional reading to explore effective differentiation. As a result, the tasks and activities that teachers and early years practitioners now plan are consistently well-matched to the varying needs of children. There is clear evidence of the positive impact of the staff team's professional learning on children's experiences. Staff should continue to practise their outward-looking approach, learning from what works well in other schools and adapting this for Inveraray Primary School.

Over the last year, school leaders and staff have worked with children and parents to develop a refreshed curriculum rationale. This is unique to the context of the historic town of Inveraray and aligned to the school's vision and values. The new approaches to planning the curriculum are helping children to develop a sense of their place in the local community and

beyond. There is a growing focus on the development of children's skills for learning, life and work. The senior leadership team recognise there is potential to develop this further. In the past year, staff have focused successfully on improving the programmes for teaching literacy and numeracy. They should continue with plans to now implement progression pathways for all curriculum areas, including digital and other technologies.

Make more effective use of the school's outdoor environment and wider community which has the potential to provide dynamic and motivating contexts for learning. Equip children with the skills to talk confidently about their learning and to know what they need to do to set and achieve more aspirational literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing targets.

All children across the early level class and primary stages continue to benefit from participating in Forest and Beach School activities on a weekly basis. This has been a long-standing feature of the life and work of Inveraray Primary School. More recently, staff have adapted these outdoor learning sessions to focus on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills in out-of-class contexts. Through their work to refresh the curriculum rationale, staff are making better use of the rich cultural, historical and geographical features of the local area. Teachers use the history of Inveraray well to plan meaningful and motivating projects. They carefully select novels and non-fiction texts to complement these worthwhile contexts for learning. Children at all stages are more motivated to learn through such relevant, real-life experiences.

In the pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all children say they enjoy school. In classes, almost all are motivated to learn and achieve. There is a marked improvement in their overall attitudes to learning from the time of the original inspection. There is a positive and purposeful ethos for learning in all classes. Almost all children now work well together in pairs and groups. Teachers provide children with clear guidance about what is expected of them in their tasks to help them to achieve. They encourage children to participate in planning and leading aspects of their own learning. Children are supported well by teachers to set targets for their own learning; evaluate their own progress within their learning and reading journals; and, help to shape the direction of their topic work. Teachers take time to have individual conversations with each child regularly about their learning and wellbeing. By P7, most children can talk confidently about the skills they are developing through classwork, topics and out-of-class activities. Children feel the school is calmer and a more relaxed and happy place to learn. Parents report that shared learning events, workshops and the use of an online app are helping them to understand how their children learn at school, and how they can help at home. All children in the early level class now have a 'learning book' that documents observations of their learning and examples of their work. These contain next steps in learning for aspects of the curriculum for individual children.

Improve further children's attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff should develop systems to gather and analyse data on children's wider achievements to bring about increased participation and engagement.

School leaders and staff have implemented a range of effective strategies and new approaches to raise children's attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. There are signs that this work is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes for children. Staff have worked well together to implement the education authority's progression pathways for literacy

and numeracy. These provide a clear framework to support teachers to develop greater rigour in their assessment and tracking of children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Teachers, early years practitioners and support staff have engaged in a range of professional learning activities to support improved attainment across literacy and numeracy. This includes adopting a more holistic approach to teaching literacy, using novel studies to motivate and encourage children to read and write. As a result, children are able to make better connections between listening, talking and reading, particularly in using higher order skills to interrogate and discuss challenging texts. Children's writing is improving as a positive consequence of this well-structured and carefully considered approach to teaching literacy. The school should continue with plans to further develop approaches to numeracy and mathematics, including planning real-life contexts. Children have a good awareness of their own wellbeing. They are increasingly using the wellbeing indicators to reflect on, and articulate, their own wellbeing strengths and needs. They report they feel more ready to learn because of the calmer ethos. The school should continue with plans to work towards a rights-based approach to developing children's sense of health and wellbeing further.

Children are now engaging well in their school community and levels of pupil participation have increased. School committees and action groups provide children with worthwhile opportunities to shape the life of their school. Children's wider and personal achievements are celebrated and valued by staff. They proudly share their individual successes with their teachers and friends at assemblies, and share photos of their achievements on a school display board. School leaders and staff have worked hard to extend the range of involvement children have within their community. This is a strong feature of the new curriculum rationale. Examples of positive partnership working to enhance children's experiences include with local forestry workers, links with the local sheltered housing complex, the town's shinty team and Gaelic choir. The headteacher is aware that a next step is to track the skills that children develop through these in-school and out-of-school wider achievements.

As a matter of importance, the school, with support from the education authority, should improve its approaches for supporting and meeting the social and emotional needs of all children.

Following the original inspection, school leaders and staff worked swiftly to significantly improve the ethos and climate for learning across the school. The focus of their work was to research good practice in becoming a nurturing school. They visited a school in Glasgow to see for themselves what works well, and engaged in extensive professional reading and training. School leaders and staff value the support of their educational psychologist, who provides high quality advice and guidance. As a result, a nurture class was established to meet the social and emotional needs of identified children. The school's allocation of the Pupil Equity Fund is used well to provide additional staffing to support this change. Children who previously found learning and participating in class very challenging, are now settled and coping well with their learning. They are independently learning to self-regulate and are beginning to take control of their own actions. All staff are increasingly aware that different approaches are necessary to best support and meet the needs of individual children. They understand and can articulate the importance of their own actions in supporting children. All children who require an individual support plan now have one in place. These plans are of high quality with measurable targets. They are reviewed regularly with children and parents. Taken together, these positive actions result in a calm, happy and more inclusive school where children are ready and able to learn.

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. Argyll and Bute Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Lesley A Johnstone
HM Inspector