

21 December 2021

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 Arisaig 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 the school. 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.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

COVID-19 has had, and is continuing to have, significant impact on the school and the community. Many children live in a rural community, which has resulted in children feeling isolated. Children and staff have lost learning and teaching time as a result of periods of isolation from school. This remains an ongoing problem for the school since the lock downs as they attempt to recover children's attainment.

During lockdown, staff took positive steps to provide children with materials and digital resources as necessary. Online learning and paper based activities worked well for children. Staff and families made good use of the class online tool to support two-way communication between school and home. Now children have returned to school, staff are trying to focus on identifying gaps in learning within literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. Some progress has been made in addressing the gaps in learning. There remains work to be done to continue to improve attainment across the school.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Staff have improved their approach to assessing children's learning across the school and nursery. They have introduced assessments to help identify where children have gaps in their learning. In writing, the depute headteacher and cluster principal teachers have created helpful assessments that show clearly children's next steps in learning. Staff make use of the Highland numeracy assessments to provide them with more information on children's learning. The leadership team now need to link assessments to the National Benchmarks to help staff make informed decisions on whether children have achieved a Curriculum for Excellence level.

In the nursery, staff have improved how they record children's progress and identify next steps in learning. Children in the nursery benefit from the small numbers with two adults. As a result, staff are able to meet their needs well. At the time of the visit, staff were in the process of moving to the adjacent purpose built nursery provision. As a next step, when they move to the new premises, staff should develop a literacy and numeracy rich learning environment to enhance children's learning both indoors and outdoors.

Overall, children are more involved in their learning and older children show skills in working independently. All staff now plan learning that is more suitable to children's age and stage of development. Staff now talk to children about what they are learning and engage them in discussion about how to achieve success. They are making good use of the online platform to share learning with parents. More could be done to help children set individual targets to help improve their learning. Children are now more involved in deciding on what they would like to learn. They now have a wider range of experiences, making use of the local environment more often for their learning. For example, children in both the school and nursery now have regular visits to the woodland for Forest Schools activities and have recently studied the sea.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy has been adversely affected by COVID-19. Children and staff have lost learning and teaching time as a result of periods of isolation from school. Staff have improved how they assess children's gaps in learning in numeracy and are taking steps to improve attainment. The leadership team and staff have made good progress in improving children's attainment in writing. The school should continue to improve both children's understanding of mathematics and the teaching of reading skills across the school. Staff require support to help younger children learn through well-planned play opportunities.

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 prioritising their plans to support recovery. As a result, the school needs more time to take forward the recommendations from the original inspection. We will carry out another visit to the school within one year of the publication of this letter. When we carry out another visit, we will write to you informing you of the progress the school has made.

Sadie Cushley
HM Inspector