

14 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 Cromarty 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 Cromarty Primary 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, staff and local authority officers the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children and families through COVID-19

Under the very effective leadership of the headteacher, Cromarty Primary School has continued to improve and grow, despite the challenges of the pandemic. At the time of the most recent visit in November 2021, there were 50 children across the primary stages. There has been significant change to staffing since the original inspection.

The headteacher and staff have kept a positive outlook during the periods of lockdown and different phases of children's return to school. At all times, staff's aim has been to support the health and wellbeing of children and families. The creative and effective ways that staff and families adapted to remote learning allowed children to continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy. Staff adopted a tailored approach to supporting children and families to learn at home. Weekly individual video calls helped teachers to understand the best way to motivate each child to help them to engage in their learning. Acting on feedback from children each week, staff planned activities that promoted a sense of fun and family learning. For example, to demonstrate their creativity and thinking skills, children devised their own board games to play at home with their families. In addition, staff sought the help of partners to help to provide a varied and stimulating range of quizzes and activities that children could choose from. This element of choice was popular with children. This has led to a change in how children do their homework now that they have returned to school. Now called 'home learning', children select from a range of extended projects and shorter tasks to complete over the course of the school term. Parents and children appreciate this flexible approach that allows children to demonstrate their skills and talents in their own unique way.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The whole school community has worked very well together to help the school to improve. Led very effectively by the headteacher, the school has made clear progress in meeting each of the recommendations that were identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher has introduced a range of helpful ways to strengthen the school's approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance. Staff have benefitted from taking part in professional learning in order to develop new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. As a relatively new staff team, teachers plan lessons and activities together each week. Staff spoke of their appreciation of this supportive way of working together. As a result, there is a consistent, high-quality approach to planning and assessing learning across the school. This is helping children to understand better what they need to do to improve their own learning. Staff are now more confident in making professional judgements about children's progress, and are embracing fully the new resources and approaches to teaching and learning.

The headteacher and staff have developed an effective strategy for raising attainment. Teachers make very good use of a wide variety of tests and check-ups to assess children's progress in learning. Teachers then set targets for individual children who need extra help in their learning, or who would benefit from being challenged more. The headteacher maintains a helpful overview of the progress that all children are making in their learning. Taken together, the steps that staff have achieved to improve learning, teaching and assessment are leading to better outcomes for children. Commendably, despite the challenges of the pandemic, attainment in literacy and numeracy has improved since 2018/19.

Teachers have worked together to make successful improvements to the curriculum. There is a refreshed focus on ensuring that children develop skills for learning, life and work in exciting and highly relevant ways. New resources for literacy and numeracy have been put in place. Children benefit from working together in mixed-age groups to learn about sustainability through motivating Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths challenges. They have frequent opportunities to learn outdoors in the unique coastal environment of The Black Isle. Children's skills in using digital technology improved during the periods of learning at home. Teachers are continuing to build on these skills by embedding the use of digital technology as part of everyday lessons and activities. All staff have benefited from training in equalities. The staff and children continue to work towards gaining further accreditation as a rights-based school. This is helping to ensure that Cromarty Primary School is an inclusive and respectful school for all.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 in connection with the original inspection. The Highland 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.

Lesley A Allan
HM Inspector