

11 January 2022

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 St Maria Goretti 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 virtual meeting with St Maria Goretti 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, a deputy head teacher and the local authority officer, 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, young people and families through COVID-19

Senior leaders feel well supported by the local authority to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. The education authority issues clear guidance and advice to senior leaders ensuring consistent messaging to reassure parents. There is a continued focus on nurture, wellbeing and effective communication. Staff collaboration and opportunities to share practice support the expectation of high quality learning experiences despite significant, ongoing challenges due to COVID-19 related absences and a damaging fire within the school building, earlier in the year.

During the first lockdown, staff responded promptly, using digital platforms and paper packs to support continued learning. The Challenge Leader of Learning and the English as an Additional Language teacher provided effective targeted support to children. Staff checked in weekly with all families, identifying those who might need support. The pupil equity funded family support worker was readily accessible to provide invaluable advice and support to families, working closely with partner organisations to help meet wider needs. As a result, senior leaders report stronger relationships with parents and partners.

Senior leaders used feedback from children, parents and staff following the first lockdown to inform practice during the second lockdown. They took creative approaches to provide digital devices and connectivity to families in need of most support. Staff increased significantly their confidence in the use of digital technology. The headteacher undertook training to support better health and wellbeing for the school community. Staff continued to prioritise children's wellbeing and to track learner engagement, making direct contact with families where concerns arose. On return to face-to-face learning, all children completed wellbeing questionnaires. These are now completed regularly. Senior leaders and staff use the data to offer targeted wellbeing support and to track the impact of interventions. Staff use a wide range of assessments to identify where children are in their learning so that any gaps can be addressed. The Digital Leader of Learning supports staff in their use of digital technology for independent and group learning tasks, and to develop progressively children's digital skills.

The new skills and better ways of working developed by staff and children over the last 18 months, continue to be built on to support recovery.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Since the original inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing, including within the senior leadership team. The headteacher has taken a proactive and determined approach to address the areas for improvement. Ably supported by the wider leadership team, the headteacher is a key driving force behind the significant progress made. Senior leaders have a clear strategic vision and strive to ensure that improvements are well-considered and evidence-based. They look outwards to identify and learn from effective practice both locally and nationally. Staff undertaking high quality professional learning is integral to the progress which they make in aspects of the school's work. Teachers are supported and encouraged by senior leaders to undertake collaborative enquiry and to lead aspects of improvement. There is a greater focus on data and its use to inform targeted interventions and planning for progress. Despite the challenges of the pandemic and a recent school fire, senior leaders maintain a solution-focused approach to continued improvement and the pace of change.

A whole-school learning and teaching strategy is now in place to support shared, high expectations and greater consistency in learning and teaching across the school. Children are active participants in their learning and are increasingly aware of their strengths and next steps. A refreshed approach to quality assurance enables senior leaders to gain a clearer view of what it is to be a learner at St Maria Goretti Primary School. This supports improvement planning and professional dialogue with staff. Teachers work in trios to reflect on their own and each other's practice. Commendably, they have maintained a clear focus on improving pedagogy throughout the pandemic. The Challenge Leader of Learning provides highly effective support as staff continue to develop creative practice in teaching across literacy. Data provided by senior leaders demonstrates raised attainment in reading and writing over the last three years. Staff are well-supported by the local authority to undertake professional learning on assessment. A clear assessment framework is in place with assessment now an integral part of the planning process to inform next steps at an individual, class and whole-school level. Staff engage well with the moderation cycle to reflect on standards across the school, making use of the benchmarks to support rigour. As planned, teachers should continue to develop confidence in planning high quality assessment.

Updated planning procedures and a robust tracking process are now in place. This includes an approach to tracking wider achievement which supports children to take responsibility and ownership of the process. Professional learning supports teachers to analyse and use effectively their own class data to inform planning and practice. Senior leaders and staff engage regularly in rigorous tracking conversations to ensure the needs of all learners are being met. Senior leaders monitor children's progress carefully to identify where additional support may be required. As a result, differentiation is improving across the school, with children experiencing more appropriate pace and challenge in their learning. Where dips in attainment are identified, planned interventions and strategies are implemented promptly. There are clear measures in place to assess the impact of interventions and to ensure that they help children to make progress.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these continue to have a significant impact on the work of the school, staff are implementing plans to support recovery, resilience and reconnection. Senior leaders and 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. Glasgow City 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.

Susie Smith
HM Inspector