

15 March 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 Sgoil a' Bhac and Sgoil Àraich Loch a Tuath¹ 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 Sgoil a' Bhac and Sgoil Àraich Loch a Tuath. 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.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

Almost all children in Gaelic and English Medium Education are very positive and reflective about the ways staff continue to support them through COVID-19. Children are enjoying being back in school. They are adapting quickly to socialising with others and building relationships. Children are clear of their role in keeping safe during the pandemic. They coped well with working within 'bubbles'. Children now appreciate that some activities curtailed by COVID-19 have resumed. They have regular opportunities to talk about their wellbeing. They are familiar with national wellbeing indicators to express their feelings and get support.

Children's engagement with learning during lockdown was very high. Their attendance in returning to school is very good. Children recognise strengths in the way that staff and partners supported them during times of learning at home or in the hub. Most children adapted quickly to using digital technology to learn. They appreciated the increased choice in when to take forward open-ended activities set by their teachers. In doing this, they developed skills in managing their time. They prioritised play and helping their families with everyday matters. Children engaged with partners from the local newsletter, 'Loch a Tuath' to record how COVID-19 experiences were effecting their area of Lewis. Children valued this authentic and important task to record history. They are evaluative and creative in how their experiences of COVID-19 could shape the future education strategy at Sgoil a' Bhac.

The headteacher and staff are making great efforts to support children's education through COVID-19. Teachers temporarily adapted the curriculum to focus on literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and building fluency in Gaelic. Practitioners in the sgoil àraich worked in learning hubs in other areas of Lewis. Support staff had a valuable role in supporting children's learning and wellbeing. They maintained contact with families. All staff had an increased focus on professional reading and learning linked to their personal needs and school improvement. Staff developed their skills in digital technology. One example of this is their use of a digital platform to communicate with children and parents, record success, monitor

progress and provide pre-recorded messages. This development has been very well received by parents and children.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

All staff in Gaelic and English Medium Education have developed as productive leaders of learning, change and improvement. They have shown resilience in coping with COVID-19, whilst driving improvements. The headteacher has managed substantial change successfully and effectively. New members of staff have joined the sgoil àraich. A consultation with parents has resulted in setting up a new playroom provision through the medium of English. The headteacher has provided temporary cover at a neighbouring primary school and sgoil àraich. This was in addition to her substantive post as headteacher at Sgoil a' Bhac. The headteacher feels very well supported and encouraged by officers at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Officers have responded quickly with a strategy for applying guidance for COVID-19.

The headteacher and staff have made clear progress towards addressing recommendations from the previous inspection. They have realistically paused a few improvement priorities due to COVID-19 and commenced other projects. The headteacher has introduced online questionnaires to seek views on what is going well and what needs to improve. She skilfully incorporates questions on the school's context for Gaelic. Staff like how they can respond to the questionnaire individually, and review collective responses, before prioritising projects for improvement. The need to work in 'bubbles' has impacted on staff's plans to visit and review each other's practice.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar based a childcare manager in the sgoil àraich to set up a strategy for improvement. She has inducted new staff effectively and provided direction for setting up a new playroom through the medium of English. She is also advising on children being sufficiently fluent in Gaelic by the end of the total immersion phase.

In both playrooms, practitioners are reviewing their practice to achieve high standards and more learning in nature. In the playroom for English Medium Education, practitioners are sensitive to the needs of individual children by giving them space to be with another adult on a one-to-one basis as required. Practitioners promote equity and inclusion of Gaelic by planning for children to learn Gaelic as an additional language. Children are confident in their use of some Gaelic in play and routines led by adults.

In the playroom for total immersion through Gaelic, the headteacher has successfully recruited fluent speakers of Gaelic. Practitioners engage well with small groups of children in total immersion play. They provide commentaries in Gaelic and ask questions so children are more actively thinking about their learning. Children have established routines where they show their understanding and use of Gaelic. They can talk about their feelings, the days of the week and stories that are being read to them. Children develop decision-making skills in adult-led activities by choosing songs to sing. Often, they are using the titles of songs in Gaelic to state their preferences. All practitioners should continue to plan high-quality learning for Gaelic and English Medium Education.

At the primary stages, staff have adapted the curriculum to address children's learning needs as a result of COVID-19. The headteacher has created a very useful one-stop approach to monitoring children's progress. She should continue to use this data to plan interventions and

design Sgoil a' Bhac's future curriculum. Teachers are increasing children's learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). A few classes are doing projects on STEM using the digital platform, e-Sgoil. All teachers have an increased focus on health and wellbeing.

The older children in Gaelic Medium Education articulate clearly the benefits of increasing their writing activities. They are aware of how this skill helps them as they move through education and into employment. Teachers in Gaelic Medium Education have evaluated their practice as they pursue even higher quality immersion education. They are developing strong specialisms in Gaelic Medium Education. Teachers have made evaluative use of 'The Advice on Gaelic Education'. They have written a policy on what informs high-quality learning, teaching and assessment through immersion. They devised a progression framework for literacy and Gàidhlig. Teachers have planned an increased focus on total immersion play. In this, younger children are listening, understanding and talking in Gaelic. Teachers are beginning to measure how this is raising attainment in talking, reading and writing. They have developed a robust way of teaching grammar in an active and engaging way. They have also looked at increasing pace and challenge by identifying ways that literacy skills in Gaelic can support skills in English. Partners, support assistants and practitioners in the sgoil àraich should be part of this project. The headteacher should give a higher priority to delivering more Gaelic (Learners) in the curriculum. This is a national priority, as well as being important to the island and the community. This should be included in the school's improvement plan.

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 implementing plans to support recovery. Staff are addressing 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. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

Joan C. Esson
HM Inspector

ⁱ Sgoil Àraich is the Gaelic word for early learning and childcare setting. Sgoil Àraich Loch a Tuath is the name of the early learning and childcare provision. In this school, sgoil àraich is used to include provision through Gaelic and English.