

1 October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

In August 2023, HM Inspectors published a letter on Bun-sgoil Srath na h-Apainne - Strath of Appin Primary School and Nursery Class. The letter sets 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.

**Increase the pace of improving key areas of the school and nursery, based on robust self-evaluation arrangements. A range of stakeholders, including staff, parents/carers and children should have lead roles for taking forward improvements.**

Across the school, the headteacher is leading the staff well to make clearer progress with this area for improvement. The headteacher and staff should continue to focus on a few key areas where children's attainment needs to be raised. The staff team have increased their use of arrangements for evaluating their practice. They need to continue using these arrangements thoroughly for more impact over time.

The headteacher has been in post for a year. Parents/carers are positive about the headteacher's 'can do' approach. Children and parents/carers feel consulted on matters that are important to them. Across the school, senior leaders, staff, parents/carers and children are renewing the school values and aims. The staff team should ensure that the school's aims include all that underpins the life and work of their school.

The headteacher is establishing more effective ways of checking the quality of the whole school's work. Staff receive useful feedback from the headteacher to improve their practice. The headteacher is starting to meet with staff to check how well all children's attainment is being raised. As a result of these meetings, staff put in place short-term support for children. Most children's attainment is improving in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. A few children exceed expected levels of achievement at the second level of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Staff are still closing significant gaps in children's attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig from when learning was interrupted from the pandemic.

Across the school, the headteacher has reintroduced an opportunity for teachers to have an individual time with her to discuss what is going well in their teaching. They also discuss the professional learning they would find useful. Senior leaders should continue to ensure that professional learning supports all staff in taking forward all priorities for improvement across the whole school.

Across the school, children participate in pupil groups and make tangible changes to support improvement. Older children also lead clubs for their peers. Children are proud of their

successes. They make a positive difference to improving the school. Going forward, senior leaders should ensure that staff across the school have time for consolidating their use of new arrangements for improvement. This is while recognising that change is appropriately paced, with positive working relationships remaining a high priority.

**Maximise total immersion education to strengthen children's progress and fluency in Gàidhlig. This should impact on the quality and quantity of total immersion and learning through play to meet national expectations.**

The school is making some positive progress with this area for improvement at the primary stages for Gàidhlig Medium Education. The headteacher and staff should continue detailing expectations on total immersion in a policy to use in evaluating the quality of practice. This should detail further improvements specific to the school.

The headteacher and staff team have increased the time children at the primary stages learn through Gàidhlig. Children in Gàidhlig Medium Education are speaking more Gàidhlig in class, independent of the teacher. They understand better how this supports their fluency.

In whole-school situations, the staff team are working hard to ensure that Gàidhlig can be seen and heard in the school. Gàidhlig is seen in wall displays. Children record Gàidhlig on sound boxes for these displays. All staff use key phrases on a daily basis. The staff team have established a Parent Club for Gàidhlig. Parents/carers of those in Gàidhlig Medium Education, and those in the pre-five unit, are offered opportunities to learn Gàidhlig.

Staff in the pre-five unit have increased children's opportunities to hear and learn Gàidhlig. Children continue to have a weekly lesson through Gàidhlig and English from primary teachers. The older children at the primary stages help children at the pre-five unit learn songs. They read stories to the younger children. A partner provides reading and singing sessions weekly for children at the early level. These take place both at the school and digitally. For the latter, children join their friends in other schools across the council. As a result, a few children in the pre-five unit respond to simple instructions in Gàidhlig. A minority of children can identify colours and numbers up to ten in Gàidhlig. Senior leaders should continue to promote parents'/carers' preferred medium of learning as their children commence early learning and childcare.

**Increase planning for progression in the curriculum so that children make stronger progress in all aspects of their learning. Children should be given more opportunities to independently use their learning in meaningful and relevant situations.**

Across the school, staff are improving this priority area. The headteacher has developed a description of the curriculum to define what is unique about children's learning. In so doing, the headteacher has consulted children, staff, parents/carers and partners very well. Staff are planning better to show what progress looks like across the curriculum. Going forward, staff should plan further high-quality assessments. This should include what children will learn and how they will know they have been successful.

Across the school, children have a strong voice in planning their learning through competitions, trips, projects and themes. This is a strength of the curriculum. They engage in a variety of school and community roles, for example, environment officer, music manager, sports officer and playground inspectors. They have a range of worthwhile leadership opportunities in committees focusing on children's rights, sustainability and pupil council.

Across the school, children apply their learning and skills well across a variety of situations, such as enterprise. Children enjoy the concept of being 'employed' by the school. They develop skills in finance by working with budgets to buy resources for the school.

Children in the pre-five unit benefit from well-planned, quality interactions. Their playroom is engaging and fosters creativity, curiosity and independence. Children engage very well in play and explore their environment. Practitioners observe play and carefully join in with high-quality questions and comments. They respond well to children's interests.

### **Raise children's attainment in all aspects of learning.**

All children's attainment has been raised in some aspects, but gaps still remain in attainment.

Across the school, the headteacher maintains a detailed check of all children's progress and attainment. Teachers and children have conversations to help children know their next steps in learning. This is at an early stage. Practitioners in the pre-five unit are clearer on children's progress through sharper observations of children's learning and progress in literacy and numeracy.

In English Medium, most children are making appropriate progress in literacy and English. A few children exceed expected levels in CfE. Across stages, children read well and identify key features of fiction and non-fiction texts. More children should improve their writing to achieve expected levels. At second level, children talk effectively and answer questions well. Children write well ranging from poems to stories. Children in Gàidhlig Medium Education are not yet at a stage to do assessments in literacy and English. This is in line with national advice for immersion schools, whose total school roll is based on P1-4.

Across the whole school, most children are making appropriate progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children who exceed in second level of CfE are beginning to work on third level outcomes in numeracy and mathematics. Children use their learning and skills across a variety of contexts, such as enterprise and events.

Children's progress in literacy and Gàidhlig is improving. At the early level, children use Gàidhlig to socialise, follow instructions and give personal information. Children are encouraged to answer questions with improved grammar. This remains an area for development. Across the early and first levels, children have a clear focus on learning the sounds of letters in Gàidhlig to reduce gaps in reading. Children still need to develop further their skills in sounding out words. By the end of the first level, children write short paragraphs in straight forward situations. Children would benefit from greater emphasis on immersion and talking to support them write more independently. Teachers' planning of learning needs to be clearer on developing children's reading of Gàidhlig at a much quicker pace.

Across the school, children are proud of their achievements at national and local Mòds. All children in the primary school take part successfully in the choir.

### 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.

Joan C. Esson  
HM Inspector