

30 August 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Onthank Primary School and Nursery Class  
East Ayrshire Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including health and wellbeing and new approaches to teaching reading. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

**How well do children learn and achieve?**

Across the school, children are very well-behaved, happy and proud of their school and community. In this large, busy school children show care and consideration to each other in class and in the playground. Older children support younger children in the school as part of their buddy and prefect roles. It is evident that the school's recent work in gaining accreditation as a Rights Respecting School is having a positive impact on relationships within the school. To ensure this becomes firmly embedded we have asked staff to make links to the rights as much as possible in day to day lessons. In the nursery class, children are happy, settled and active in their play throughout most of the session. Overall, they engage confidently and enthusiastically in play activities both indoors and in the outdoor area. Children now need more opportunities to talk about and plan their learning with staff. This will support children in sustaining their play for longer periods of time. We have asked staff to increase the opportunities children have to hear Gaelic in their free play activities. Overall, children across the school are motivated and interested in their learning. At times, children were not active enough in their learning. In the best examples, the purpose of lessons is shared with children. We have asked that this becomes more consistent across all classes. In a few classes, children could discuss their personal learning targets well. This is not yet a feature in all classes. We have asked staff to talk to children more regularly about how they can improve their learning. Across the school, children respond well to the opportunities they have to take on roles of responsibility such as members of Pupil Council, Junior Road Safety Committee and as 'Scooter Tutors'. Children have been learning to look after the environment through gaining three Eco-Schools Scotland green flags.

In the nursery class, children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. Their progress in literacy and Gàidhlig could be much stronger. The majority of children listen well and confidently share experiences with other children and staff. A few children choose to look at books and can retell favourite stories. Children show a positive aptitude for learning new vocabulary and phrases. This needs to be built on to ensure children make the best possible progress in literacy and Gàidhlig. Children count as part of their play and daily routines. Children applied their skills as they counted and recorded the number of parents who attended their transition event. We have asked staff to build on opportunities such as this to ensure children make better progress in numeracy and mathematics. Overall, in the primary classes children are making good progress in literacy, English language, Gaelic, and in numeracy and mathematics. In most classes, children participate well in group discussions. As part of a P7/S1 transition project, P7 children wrote and confidently presented information to their peers about countries linked to the Olympic Games, highlighting both humanitarian issues and engineering feats associated with the countries. Across the school, children engage well in reading activities. The headteacher and staff have had a strong focus on improving approaches to the teaching of reading, as a result children are engaging better in reading activities. Pleasingly, staff are beginning to plan for reading and writing using more real-life contexts. For example, following a visit to Dean Castle Park, children used pamphlets to read for information and highlight interesting facts to share with others. In the Gaelic Medium classes, children are very keen to speak Gaelic in class and beyond. They listen attentively and contribute well to discussions led by the teacher, or when working in pairs and small groups. Across the school, children are gaining confidence in using their mental maths strategies. Most children can use a range of strategies to solve problems and are developing their ability to explain their thinking. At the upper stages staff are using 'Number Talks' to develop children's knowledge and ability to use a range of strategies to solve problems and this is showing early signs of having a positive impact. Most children can relate their learning in numeracy and mathematics to real-life contexts and helpful projects such as 'Money Week' support this well. Older children display a sound understanding of multiplication, division and fractions, measurement and shape. To ensure children make the best possible progress in literacy and English, literacy and Gàidhlig and numeracy and mathematics we have asked staff to ensure children are appropriately challenged in their learning. We have asked staff to review how often children work in pairs to support each other. This is preventing some children from making brisker progress. Children are making good progress and achieving well in physical education and most areas of health and wellbeing. They can talk with confidence about the Rights of the Child and how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations including the use of online and social media sites.

### **How well does the school support children to develop and learn?**

In the nursery class, children are safe and well cared for. Recent improvements to the outdoor area afford children more relevant learning experiences. We have asked staff to develop the playroom to provide similar open ended, child-led activities. Although, staff plan a few activities to promote the use of Gaelic, children do not yet have enough opportunities to develop their knowledge of Gaelic language. Overall, the school's approaches to meeting the needs of all children are good. In the best lessons, activities and resources were well-matched to the needs of the children and

were sufficiently challenging. To ensure children attain as highly as possible we have asked staff to increase the level of challenge for the most able children. The school is developing approaches to monitor and track children's progress. This will help to identify children who require support or challenge in learning. Support for children requiring additional support in their learning is a strong feature of the school's work. This is led skilfully by a principal teacher. She has an in depth knowledge of children's needs across the school and monitors well how supports are impacting on progress. Staff work collaboratively with partners and specialist agencies to plan learning. East Ayrshire Support Team (EAST) staff play a pivotal role in assessing and supporting children to ensure they make the best possible progress. All staff have been involved in working towards Dyslexia Friendly Schools accreditation. This has helped them gain a better understanding of how they can adapt their teaching to better meet the needs of all learners. Support staff work well alongside teachers in classes to provide targeted support for groups and individuals. There are also good examples of support staff helping to develop children's fluency in the Gaelic Medium Classes. There is a strong focus on meeting the health and wellbeing needs of all children. The senior leadership team, together with staff are committed to improving positive outcomes for children in this area.

Across the school, staff have taken steps to improve how they deliver the curriculum. In the nursery class, staff are aware of the principles of immersion and now need to provide more language rich experiences. By providing stronger immersion experiences this will help raise attainment for children in the nursery class. In the Gaelic Medium primary classes, children benefit from a curriculum which is based on improved approaches to the development of Gaelic language. Across the school, the curriculum is based on the school's vision to develop ambition in children so that they can achieve their full potential. Staff recognise the need to improve the curriculum to ensure they build on their learning as they progress through the school. The school has introduced new approaches and resources to support the development of children's reading skills. As a result, children are having more positive experiences. We have asked staff to ensure a high priority is given to the development of the curriculum and to improve arrangements for assessing children's progress to help children achieve even more. The school makes good use of partners to enhance children's experience for example, Kilmarnock Football Club deliver sessions in nutrition and sports. Children are well supported as they start primary 1 and staff ensure they build on children's learning appropriately. Strong partnerships with staff in James Hamilton High School and Grange Academy ensure children make successful transition to S1.

### **How well does the school improve the quality of its work?**

The headteacher has been in post for two years. She has fostered positive relationships with children, staff and parents, and has created a more positive learning environment. Staff are keen to support school improvement by taking on key leadership roles in developing many aspects of the school's work. It is important that the headteacher and depute maintain a clear overview of how new developments are impacting on children's experiences and progress. The school now needs to build on new approaches to monitor and evaluate the work of the school to ensure children's experiences and progress improves continuously. Improvements to the curriculum need to progress at a brisker pace. Across the school, staff need to be more reflective

of their own practice and be clearer about how the school can improve. To effect positive change, it is important that children, parents and partners are more involved in school improvement. Overall, parents are happy with the school and believe the school is helping their children to learn.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Well-behaved and enthusiastic children who are proud of their school and contribute meaningfully to their community.
- How the headteacher and staff have improved the learning environment.
- Commitment to promoting children's health and wellbeing.
- Strong collaboration with a range of partners to provide valuable support for children.

We discussed with staff and East Ayrshire Council how they might continue to improve the school and nursery class. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to develop the curriculum to ensure progression and depth in learning across all subject areas.
- Increase pace and challenge of learning to ensure children make the best possible progress.
- Improve approaches to immersion in the nursery for Gaelic Medium to help raise attainment.
- Continue to develop the school's approaches to self-evaluation, to ensure they lead consistently to improvement in children's experiences and attainment.

#### **What happens at the end of the inspection?**

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school needs more time to make necessary improvements. Education Scotland's Area Lead Officer will discuss with East Ayrshire Council how best to provide support for the school in order to build further capacity for improvement. He will maintain contact to monitor progress. We shall ask East Ayrshire Council, working with the school, to provide us with a progress report within twelve months and decide at that point whether a further inspection is required. Parents will be informed of our decision.

Jackie Maley  
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/OnthankPrimarySchoolEastAyrshire.asp>

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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