

16 June 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2017, HM Inspectors published a letter on Hillhead Primary School. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and East Ayrshire Council. We subsequently returned to the school to look at how it had continued to improve its work, and published another letter in August 2018. 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.

Develop more effective self-evaluation approaches which lead to improved outcomes for all children at Hillhead Primary School.

Overall, there has been very good progress in taking forward this area for improvement. Although there are a number of temporary acting leadership posts, the acting headteacher, supported well by the acting depute headteacher, is providing effective leadership and strong direction in a number of important aspects of school practice and provision. Several principal teachers, two of whom are also in acting positions, contribute effectively to school development priorities. The school community would welcome a period of stability in the leadership team in driving forward further school improvement.

Staff are working very well together, with the support of senior leaders, in taking forward agreed areas for development. Children benefit from improved learning experiences, better quality relationships and teaching approaches that meet their needs more effectively. Staff benefit from, and engage in, a range of professional learning opportunities to improve further their practice. Senior leaders, working with staff, should continue to improve the consistency of high-quality learning and teaching across the school.

Overall, senior leaders monitor the work of the school more effectively. They use a range of approaches that provide more meaningful and relevant information on how well school interventions and strategies are improving outcomes for children. The local authority has played a significant role in supporting the school to improve.

Continue to improve learning and teaching across the school, ensuring an appropriate level of pace, challenge and differentiation. Children should be given opportunities to lead their own learning and be more involved in evaluating their own progress and next steps.

There has been significant improvement in children's engagement in their learning. There is a calm, more settled environment where almost all children enjoy learning, and are more engaged during lessons. The school benefits from extensive investment from the local authority to improve the physical environment for learning. Attractive displays across the school contribute to the positive climate for learning.

The pace of learning has improved, with children becoming more actively involved in their learning. In moving forward, teachers need to ensure that tasks and activities are appropriately challenging across all stages, in order to support all children to make the best possible progress in their learning. Support staff work well to provide children with additional help in tasks and activities. The supportive ethos and culture of the school is underpinned by respectful and nurturing relationships.

Children are beginning to discuss their strengths in learning and next steps in literacy and numeracy. Staff should continue to develop approaches to providing children with specific learning targets. Parents would welcome greater guidance on how to support their children in achieving these targets. All children are involved in school committees. These provide them with greater opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Children should be given further opportunities to lead their own learning.

Develop a school curriculum that is relevant, meets the needs of all learners and supports children to develop knowledge and skills across all curriculum areas.

There has been good progress in taking forward this area for improvement. All children now receive their full entitlement to a broad general education.

Courses and programmes are in place for all areas of the curriculum. These make reference to the knowledge and skills that children should develop over time. Children now build more effectively on their learning as they progress through the school. Staff continue to benefit from developing their understanding of shared standards and expectations. There are plans for them to continue with this work to ensure children make appropriate progress in their learning.

Almost all staff continue to explore ways in which outdoor learning can enhance learning experiences across the curriculum. Children are responding very well to these experiences. For example, the 'hedgehog café' is an interesting and creative approach to developing children's awareness of sustainable development. Staff should continue to plan relevant and meaningful learning experiences for children across the curriculum.

Through meeting the wellbeing, inclusion and learning needs of all children, raise attainment and achievement across all primary stages.

Senior leaders and staff have continued to work together to improve significantly the ethos and climate for learning across the school. A key focus of their work has been in successfully becoming a nurturing school. Reported instances of bullying have declined considerably and children have an improved sense of safety. Commendably, there have been no exclusions in this current school session. The school is now a calm, happy, purposeful and more inclusive environment for learning.

Children who previously found learning and behaving in class extremely challenging are now more settled and coping much better with their learning. They are learning independently to self-regulate and are beginning to take control of their own actions. Across the school, in classes and in open areas, children are routinely polite, kind, very well behaved and interested in each other.

The acting depute headteacher continues to work effectively to ensure compliance with legislation and statutory duties. Support plans are of higher quality and include more meaningful targets that are monitored and evaluated more rigorously and robustly. This ensures that children who require additional support experience success and appropriate progress in their learning.

Continue to develop approaches across the school for planning, assessment and moderation. This should include robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress in learning and achievement whilst ensuring staff set high expectations

Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress in taking forward approaches to planning, teaching, learning and assessment.

Staff work well together to plan better children's learning. Further work is now required to ensure that assessment is integral to planning children's learning. In all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning and what successful learning looks like. Staff have benefited from professional learning with a focus on tracking children's progress on an ongoing basis. They should continue with this work to ensure they have a shared and robust understanding of expectations in children's learning.

Senior leaders have adopted the local authority's tracking and monitoring system. This more systematic way of collecting data provides them with an overview of attainment over time in literacy and numeracy. It also provides more reliable attainment data for each individual child. As a result, senior leaders and staff are able to identify more accurately children who would benefit from further targeted support in their learning. This is leading to better outcomes for children.

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. East Ayrshire Council will inform parents about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of its schools.

Dennise Sommerville
HM Inspector