

Summarised Inspection Findings

Ardfern School

SEED No: 8680140

02 May 2017

1.3 LEADERSHIP OF CHANGE

good

This indicator focuses on working together at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which reflects the context of the setting within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and clearly linked to strong self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure that the pace of change is well judged and appropriate to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and children and young people. The themes are:

- *Developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community*
 - *Strategic planning for continuous improvement*
 - *Implementing improvement and change*
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- The school has a clear focus on encouraging children and young people to fulfil their potential and to support them into positive post-school destinations. Whilst values are not explicitly stated, there is a clearly shared commitment by staff to meet the school's aims to create a welcoming, supportive environment where children and young people can make progress with their learning. Senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of the social and economic background of children and families. This results in flexible, caring, needs-led approaches which have a positive impact on outcomes for learners. The school now needs to revisit its vision, values and aims to ensure a shared understanding and ownership amongst all stakeholders.
 - The headteacher is highly respected by children and young people, staff, parents and partners. She works closely with the Director to ensure that resources are in place to meet the needs of their learners. Centre managers, ably supported by their deputies, provide effective leadership for staff on day-to-day operational matters. Under their leadership, staff in each centre work together effectively to support children and young people and each other. The Director, headteacher and senior managers meet regularly to ensure good communication and teamwork across the school. These meetings now need to have a greater focus on whole school improvements and strategic planning.
 - The Director and headteacher are very committed to developing staff skills and succession planning. All staff have an annual Professional Review and Development (PRD) meeting and are supported throughout the year to attend courses or to undertake professional learning visits. Professional development days are used to good effect to take forward most aspects of the school's improvement plan and to raise awareness of national developments. The school should now build on this by continuing to be outward looking, seeking best practice elsewhere and developing further their existing links with other schools.
 - The school has a calendar of self-evaluation activities which includes reviews of teachers' planning and learners' work, classroom observations and monitoring Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs). The school has recognised the need to place more emphasis on systematic approaches to self-evaluation and quality assurance and has appointed a quality improvement officer to lead on aspects of this. This is at its early stages and the school needs to develop this role further to embed improved quality assurance procedures across both centres. This includes systematically gathering a wider range of evidence and data on the quality of the

school's work to better influence future priorities for whole school improvements.

- The school improvement plan format was changed this session to include a small number of key priorities and a separate section on business development. It includes targets with actions to be taken and allocation of responsibilities. Good progress has been made in relation to some targets, in particular the work being done to embed literacy across the curriculum. Although staff have been regularly consulted about priorities within the improvement plan, not all staff demonstrated ownership of these priorities. In line with the school's approaches to developing leadership at all levels, more staff should continue to be given responsibilities for leading tasks in the improvement plan. There are positive examples of this which the school should build on. For example staff leading the development of a school newspaper to encourage writing and publish information to parents and carers.
- The school provides parents with an annual Standards and Quality Report with a focus on the wellbeing indicators. The school now needs to ensure the Standards and Quality Report includes a report on the previous year's improvement plan and young people's attainment and achievement, as well as improvement priorities for the coming year.
- Overall parents were very happy with the work of the school and pleased with the difference it was making for their children. The school should build on its existing very good relationships with parents to increase parental engagement and involvement in school improvement. Whilst pupils do have a say in aspects of school life and occasionally take on responsibility, plans to further develop the pupil council should be progressed.
- The school can evidence the positive impact of implementation of change upon outcomes for children and young people, both in terms of their wellbeing and achievements. In particular, most young people improve their attendance and engagement with their learning significantly at Ardfern compared to previous placements. They are building their confidence and are keen to succeed. This is enabling young people to gain a good range and number of National Qualifications and wider achievement awards, and successfully move on into work, training or further education.

2.3 LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high quality learning experiences for children and children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, children and young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- *Learning and engagement*
- *Quality of teaching*
- *Effective use of assessment*
- *Planning, tracking and monitoring*

- Almost all children and young people are motivated, enthusiastic and keen to progress with their learning. They are well behaved, listen attentively to instructions and remain on task during lessons. Across the school, staff have very warm and caring relationships with children and young people. They help children and young people to feel safe, included and confident in seeking support when required.
- Most staff are adopting a range of creative learning and teaching strategies to help motivate and engage children and young people with their learning. Most children and young people work conscientiously through tasks. They engage particularly well when they are interested in and challenged by learning activities. Staff are adept at providing carefully tailored learning activities both in and out with the classroom which children and young people find enjoyable and stimulating, and allow them to apply their learning in real and relevant contexts. A few classroom based lessons observed did have an over-reliance on teacher-led dialogue and the use of worksheet and desk-based learning. This led to a few children and young people becoming passive and disengaged with their learning. In such instances, staff need to consistently use more resourceful and imaginative approaches to engage and stimulate children and young people.
- Staff use their sound knowledge of children's and young people's needs to motivate and encourage them to participate and move forward with their learning. Most are adept at supporting children and young people to remain focused and engaged with their learning even when they are distracted by personal circumstances or the actions of their peers. This has helped a number of previously disengaged children and young people to successfully re-engage with their learning.
- There are examples of children's and young people's learning being enhanced by the effective use of digital technology across a number of curricular areas including, English, social subjects and technical. The school recognises there is scope to develop this area further.
- Children and young people experience valuable learning activities across the four contexts of learning. In particular, the opportunities for children to learn and achieve beyond the classroom are a strong feature of the work of the school. This includes a wide range of whole-school initiatives, worthwhile educational trips, outdoor learning, and an extensive summer programme. Children and young people spoke very enthusiastically about being involved in initiatives such as 'Operation Christmas Child'

and the 'Superhero Project' and visiting places of interest, including the Glasgow Cenotaph and the Falkirk Wheel. The school should now plan such activities with a clearer focus on children and young people developing and applying skills for life, learning and work.

- Children and young people spoke positively about their learning experience at Ardfern School especially in relation to previous placements. Consultation with learners at both sites influence aspects of school life such as food, trips and charity events. However, there is scope to increase pupil voice further. Children's and young people's learning is often directed too much by teaching staff. Staff need to involve children and young people more in planning and reviewing their own learning. This would help children and young people to take more responsibility for aspects of their learning and increase opportunities for personalisation and choice.
- Almost all learning activities build on prior learning and most tasks and activities provide appropriate challenge for children and young people. The majority of staff use a good range of assessment approaches. However overall approaches to assessment require further development to ensure that assessment forms a more integral part of the planning process. Staff need to continue to develop their understanding of assessment to enable them to use a wider range of evidence to accurately measure children's and young people's progress with their learning across all areas of the curriculum, especially within the broad general education.
- There are a number of examples of Assessment is for Learning strategies being used throughout the school, notably the use of learning intentions and success criteria. Overall the effective use of Assessment is for Learning strategies however, is too variable amongst staff. The school should revisit the use of Assessment is for Learning to ensure all staff are using such strategies effectively. In particular, staff need to consistently provide high quality feedback to children and young people in plenary sessions.
- The school has identified the need for improved systems to be put in place for moderating practice and understanding of standards. However, there is not yet sufficient evidence of this being taken forward particularly with any other schools. Staff should be supported in the development of their understanding of shared standards in order to improve consistency across the school.
- Through the use of effective Individualised Education Programmes, staff monitor and evaluate children's and young people's progress in terms of the four capacities with particular emphasis on positive behaviour and personal development. Staff also track children's and young people's progress across the curriculum and use this information to inform reports to parents and other partners. However, these reports often provide limited information on pupil's progress with their learning especially at the broad general education stage. Staff, supported by senior leaders, need to more rigorously track progress against agreed standards and ensure that they provide clear information on the progress of children and young people across all areas of the curriculum.

1.4 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF STAFF: theme 1

Governance framework

- The school's Director oversees the running of the organisation and works closely with the headteacher to ensure that resources are in place to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them. There is a business development section included in the improvement plan which takes into account the changing dynamics and numbers at both centres. The very small numbers of stakeholder concerns are dealt with effectively.
- There is a strong focus on high quality learning and engagement and a caring ethos, and staff are recruited with this in mind. To its credit, the organisation is considering succession planning and is supporting a number of staff to undertake further qualifications. The school should continue with this approach to nurturing staff skills and abilities and succession planning.
- The Director and headteacher meet regularly with the five Local Authorities who currently have children and young people placed at the school. The purpose of these meetings is to review how well outcomes for children and young people are being achieved, and how well the partnership is working. These meetings are positive and the representatives from two Local Authorities we met told us that they were very happy with the work of the school. They also said that the school shares their priorities for improvement with them but they are not formally involved in shaping the school's improvement plan.
- We discussed with the school the idea of having an external voluntary group, comprising people with relevant professional backgrounds, to further enhance the school's approaches to quality assurance.

2.4 PERSONALISED SUPPORT: theme 2 Targeted Support

- Children, young people, parents and local authority partners responded very positively in relation to the school's ability to meet the needs of children and young people. In particular, they spoke very highly of pastoral support, the ethos of the school, positive relationships, improved behaviour and the ability of staff to re-engage children and young people with their learning.
- Positive steps are taken to identify and address factors such as health problems, family circumstances or social and emotional issues which may affect learning. Staff have indicated that the referral process could include more information about demographics and cultural background of individuals.
- There are effective systems in place to ensure continuity and consistency in delivering support to children and young people, such as a well-trained staff and a strong sense of teamwork. Communication with parents and partners is a well-established positive feature of the school.
- Children's and young people's progress is reviewed regularly. Children, young people, parents and other agencies contribute appropriately to review meetings. There is evidence in place to show that most children and young people are benefitting from well-planned interventions. The school should now more closely monitor children's and young people's success in achieving their targets in behaviour, personal and social development, and in literacy and numeracy where appropriate. Staff should also reflect on the individualised strategies used to support children and young people, and be creative and imaginative in identifying specific personalised support strategies for each child and young person.

2.1: SAFEGUARDING

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and where appropriate, children and young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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3.1 ENSURING WELLBEING, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

very good

This indicator reflects on the school's approach to children's wellbeing which underpins their ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of each individual. A clear focus on wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all children to be the best they can be and celebrates their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- *Wellbeing*
- *Fulfilment of statutory duties*
- *Inclusion and equality*

- The very caring ethos of the school places children and young people at the heart of everything it does. Very positive relationships are evident between staff, children and young people, and the parents we spoke to told us that they felt communication with the school was supportive which made them feel valued. Staff know children and young people and their families very well and the school operates a very effective keyworker system to foster close relationships with children and families. A major strength of the school is the valuable support offered to children and their families at all times, including outwith the school day and during holiday periods.
- Staff have a very strong understanding of children's and young people's needs and interests and are very flexible in the support they provide, working effectively and in close partnership with a wide range of other professionals and partners. The partners we spoke to say that the school achieves very good outcomes for children's and young people's health and wellbeing, which prepared them to move on to sustainable post-school destinations. They praised the perseverance of staff and the solution-focused approach taken to challenges which results in very few placement breakdowns.
- Transitions into the school are well planned. Information about the school is provided to the child or young person and their parents, and they are invited to visit the school to meet staff. This reassures them and means that new pupils generally settle quickly into Ardfern. Staff feel that baseline information about children and young people could be improved and plan to take this forward. Senior leaders should continue to work with local authority colleagues to ensure that valuable information about children's and young people's learning is shared prior to the placement taking place.
- Each child or young person has an IEP, with a small number of achievable targets, which focus on behaviour and personal and social development. Regular multi-agency review meetings are held after an initial six week assessment period, to monitor progress. The views of children and young people, as well as those of parents, are taken into account. Most children and young people are making good or very good progress towards achieving their targets. The school reports on the wellbeing indicators in its annual Standards and Quality Report. It should now incorporate the wellbeing indicators into the existing planning processes for children and young people.

- There is a strong sense of teamwork across the staff group at each centre, and a commendable understanding of the need to consider the wellbeing of staff as well as children and young people and their families. Life space interviews are used to very good effect in the aftermath of any major incident and there is reflection on how any incidents can be avoided in future. This results in low levels of critical incidents and exclusions and ensures that children and young people and staff feel safe and respected.
- Both school centres have high levels of security and are strictly non-smoking, and children and young people are supervised at all times during the school day. There are opportunities to learn outdoors and in the community, and a summer programme is offered during two weeks of the summer holidays. The school should continue with its plans to improve the outdoor learning environment and consider creating social spaces for children and young people to spend breaks and lunchtimes with their peers.
- There is very good coverage of health and wellbeing in the curriculum including all pupils receiving their entitlement to two hours of physical education. Fitness tests are used to very good effect to motivate children and young people to be active and to measure improvements in physical fitness. In home economics, healthy alternatives are always considered in cooking activities, which the children and young people enjoy. There is an effective personal and social education (PSE) programme which is needs led and age and stage appropriate. Staff are skilled at adapting this programme to respond to personal circumstances of children and young people, and any community issues which may arise. The school should now further develop its approaches to tracking health and wellbeing outcomes more systematically.
- Through the promotion of children's rights across the school, children and young people demonstrate a good awareness of how to treat all people with compassion, respect and in a fair and just manner. This is apparent during the extensive range of community initiatives which children and young people participate in. The school celebrates diversity through a range of learning activities both in school and in the community. For example, celebrating the Chinese New Year and learning about the challenges facing asylum seekers.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of legislation and statutory requirements and ensure that all staff know what is expected of them. Relevant policies and procedures are in place. Staff engage in regular professional development and ensure they keep abreast with issues affecting the rights, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people.
- Children's and young people's views are sought regularly about a range of topics for example, gathering their ideas for school trips and fundraising. Recently changes have been made to the range of food available at lunchtime following a request by the children and young people. There are pupil councils at each site but these could meet more regularly with children and young people being supported to take more of a lead role.
- The school operates a soft start to the day which is popular with children and young people and helps them settle before the start of lessons. The school should now plan the activities included in this valuable time to form part of the curriculum.

3.2 RAISING ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- *Attainment in literacy and numeracy*
- *Attainment over time*
- *Overall quality of learner's achievement*
- *Equity for all learners*

- Overall, most children and young people at Ardfern School achieve positive outcomes over time, taking into account achievement, attainment, social and emotional progress, positive destinations, engagement with others and behaviour. Parents and local authorities who place their children and young people at Ardfern School report high levels of satisfaction with the service and with the outcomes children and young people achieve.

Attainment over time

- In recent years, according to the school's own data, almost all young people achieved a good range of qualifications and wider achievement awards. Data (as was available) shows young people consistently achieving National Qualification course awards across a wide range of subjects predominantly at National 3 and National 4. These subjects included, English, history, media, practical cookery, mathematics, administration, practical craft skills, and literacy and numeracy awards. A few young people achieved course awards at National 5, mainly in literacy and numeracy. The school recognises there is scope to further improve pupil attainment especially the range and number of National 4, National 5 and, potentially, Higher awards.
- The school needs to provide a better summary of whole-school progress and trends in relation to attainment and achievement especially within the broad general education phase. The school now needs to pull together a cohesive overview of whole-school progress and thus identify areas of strength and aspects for further development. This would provide a more coherent picture, both individually, in cohorts, and as a whole school.
- The school has been successful in maintaining high levels of attendance for most pupils, many of whom have well-established patterns of non-attendance at previous educational placements. The school has also maintained low exclusion figures and had very few physical restraints in recent years. Senior leaders should now monitor these levels systematically across both sites to measure continued success and, where necessary, respond to any changes in this positive profile.

Literacy

- Based on a range of evidence gathered by HM Inspectors, most children and young people are making good progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy.
- Observations of learning show that children and young people are making good progress in their writing. They write across a range of purposes and genre including,

factual information and personal experiences. Children in P6/7 can demonstrate an understanding of Scots language and its effect. With support, they can produce simple, structured writing pieces showing awareness of purpose and audience.

- Most children and young people are improving their reading skills. Many young people at the senior phase can read fairly complex texts with expression and understanding and answer questions which challenge them to explain choices and responses.
- All children and young people are given opportunities to develop their listening and talking skills. In most classes, most young people are enthusiastic contributors to whole class and group discussion, asking for explanations, seeking clarification and responding well to questions.

Numeracy

- Overall, the majority of children and young people are making satisfactory progress in numeracy, with a few making good or very good progress.
- Most children and young people are working within appropriate levels of Curriculum for Excellence or towards national qualifications in maths and numeracy. They are encouraged to work with numbers, calculate percentages and use mental arithmetic strategies in their calculations.
- Most children and young people are making progress overall in catching up with any gaps in their mathematical knowledge. Most children and young people were confidently developing their knowledge and skills with shapes, pattern and symmetry, negative numbers, scale, angles, money and time.
- Children and young people are beginning to develop an understanding of the concepts and processes of mathematics and are learning to apply these across the curriculum. They show an increasing understanding that they use numeracy skills in other subjects, for example using measurement and shape in craft and design technology.

Achievements

- The school places great emphasis on celebrating children's and young people's achievements. Successes are celebrated in a range of ways including displays, newsletters, certificates, yearbooks and award ceremonies.
- Children and young people are able to participate in a wide range of sporting and physical activities including, football, climbing, athletics, swimming and fly fishing.
- Children and young people raise their awareness of local community and global citizenship through raising money for a number of worthwhile charities. In recent times, they have raised money for Sport Relief, assisted in the donation and forming of food parcels at Maryhill Food Bank, and raised a number of boxes for Operation Christmas Child.
- The school should further develop children's and young people's record of achievements to enable them to recognise, reflect and build on the skills and capacities they are developing through wider achievement experiences. The

identification and tracking of skills would help the school to plan progressive development of key skills such as resilience, teamwork and leadership.

Equity

- The school places great emphasis on supporting young people to move onto positive destinations. All May 2016 school leavers moved onto positive destinations including college placements and modern apprenticeships.
- The school places great emphasis on supporting and raising the attainment of disadvantaged and disengaged children and young people. However, where appropriate, they should continue to creatively plan personalised programmes for children and young people that includes learning activities out with their generic timetabled activities.

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SCHOOL CHOICE OF QI: 2.6 TRANSITIONS

- Arrangements to support learners and their families
 - Collaborative planning and delivery
 - Continuity and progression in learning
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- The school plans and works effectively with partner agencies to ensure that transition arrangements are smooth and well planned. There are effective arrangements in place to involve families in transitions for children and young people. At the point when a placement is being considered, visits to the centre are arranged so that children and young people, and their parents can see the school and meet the staff. This helps to reassure them and helps to ensure a positive start to their time at Ardfern. Staff will also visit children and young people in their previous school to get to know them. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, all the children and young people said they had been well supported to move to the school. The school recognises that there is scope to improve baseline information and curricular transition at the point of entry to the school where possible.
 - Children and young people and their parents are encouraged to be engaged in transitions at all stages of their learning. Regular meetings are held to review progress, and children, young people and their parents are always encouraged to be involved. Staff will make every effort to encourage and support children, young people and their parents to come to the school, including making home visits and contact after school hours when required. Parents who met with us confirmed that they felt well supported by school staff.
 - The school places a strong emphasis on career planning as children and young people approach school leaving age. Almost all children and young people leave the school with a planned placement at college or in a work setting. The school should ensure careers education is taught at each age and stage, in line with the experiences and outcomes for planning choices and changes in Curriculum for Excellence. Closer work with Skills Development Scotland to gather intelligence about the local jobs market will help the school to plan the most appropriate work experience for children and young people in areas where there are most likely opportunities for employment in the future.

PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL

- The very caring and nurturing climate within the school which places children and young people at the heart of everything it does. Positive relationships with staff help children and young people to re-engage with education and make progress with their learning.
- The high quality pastoral support offered to children, young people and their families, including outwith the school day and during holiday periods. This contributes towards very good health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people.
- The clear focus on learning and attainment and the extensive range of outdoor and community based learning offered by the school. Through effective use of small class groups, staff support children and young people very well through carefully tailored learners' experiences. As a result, most young people attain and achieve well.

AGREED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR THE SCHOOL

- The school needs to take a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement planning. These approaches should include more input from children, young people, parents and partners.
- Staff should further develop approaches to tracking and monitoring children's and young people's progress with their learning.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF THE 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. The school will inform parents/carers about the school's progress as part of its arrangements for reporting on the quality of the school.