

21 December 2021

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 St Serf's Primary School, 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 St Serf's Primary School. 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

The staff team has changed significantly since the original inspection. The appointment of a new headteacher and depute headteacher in 2020 brought renewed leadership and direction to the school. They prioritised correctly the need to focus on developing relationships and providing stability to the school community at that time.

Staff reflected on their own experiences of the first lockdown, and sought feedback from children and parents, to inform their approach to the second lockdown. This resulted in a much greater focus on learning during the second lockdown. Staff monitored children's engagement in remote learning closely, enabling them to respond quickly to the specific needs of children and families. The development of more robust approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress helped inform the provision of appropriate support further.

Staff and practitioners have deepened their understanding of the school community because of their engagement with children and families during the pandemic. Effective partnership working with a range of agencies enabled staff to support individual children and families appropriately during periods of remote learning.

The introduction of a more collaborative approach to planning enabled staff to work together more effectively in teams. This supported staff well to manage the workload associated with delivering learning in both the hub and remotely. This team approach strengthened staff relationships and enabled them to build connections with children in other classes.

Parents lack of access to their child's classroom because of COVID-19 mitigations continues to be a frustration for everyone linked to the school. Staff continue to develop creative ways to share children's learning electronically. The use of virtual support meetings enables a few families to engage more easily with the school.

Progress with recommendations from the previous inspection

The strategic leadership of the school has improved significantly since the original inspection. The headteacher, supported ably by the depute headteacher, have a clear, appropriate and aspirational vision for the school. Both leaders are highly effective in their role and work extremely well together as a senior leadership team. This is having a notable impact on school improvement. They have a very sound understanding of the school's strengths, areas for development, and what needs to be done to improve. Approaches to monitoring and tracking children's progress have been strengthened. Staff are beginning to utilise the information gathered more effectively to inform planning. Leadership opportunities for staff have increased and a strong sense of teamwork has been established.

Improvement priorities reflect the points for action arising from the original inspection and support recovery from the pandemic appropriately. The views of children, parents and staff are used to inform improvement planning and measure the impact of work undertaken. Senior leaders use a range of data very effectively to inform decision-making, enabling them to set an appropriate pace of change.

Children's opportunities to be involved actively in making decisions have increased significantly this year. The introduction of a house system and the 'Junior Leadership Team', in addition to other leadership roles, make children feel valued and respected. Children across the school now speak confidently about the school's values and how they are supporting improvement. They are rising to the challenge these new opportunities provide.

The development of an agreed quality learning and teaching policy, and quality assurance framework, is leading to greater consistency in children's learning experiences across the school. The new collaborative approach to planning topics has been instrumental in driving forward improvements in learning and teaching. Staff feel more able to be creative and utilise the expertise of others more readily. As a result, children are more easily seeing connections in learning with other year groups across the school. Their motivation and engagement in learning has increased and they are enjoying the use of relevant and current contexts, such as the Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26). Staff and children's digital skills have increased significantly as a result of remote learning and these skills are now evident in classroom practice.

Senior leaders have developed effective systems and frameworks over the past year to support the school's approaches to raising attainment and achievement. These are still at an early stage of implementation, however, appropriate plans are in place to strengthen their impact further.

What happens next?

The school has been responding well to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery well. Staff have addressed 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. Clackmannanshire Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Pamela Adamson
HM Inspector