

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 Gigha Primary School and nursery class, 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 Gigha Primary School and nursery class. 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 staff and local authority officers 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 and families through COVID-19

Gigha Primary School continues to be a welcoming and caring school for children and families. At the time of the most recent visit in November 2021, there were 11 children at the primary stages and one child in the pre-5 unit. There have been some changes to staffing since the original inspection.

The headteacher and staff have remained positive and focused on protecting the health and wellbeing of all during the course of the pandemic. Through the periods of lockdown, staff worked creatively to provide a range of motivating lessons and activities for children. They devised family learning activities using the unique natural environment and rich heritage of the Isle of Gigha as a wonderful focus for learning. This has supported children to be actively engaged in exploring their island whilst learning remotely at home. Teachers ensured there was an appropriate balance of independent learning activities for children, as well as online lessons. Staff provided regular opportunities for children to talk about and reflect on their own learning as they worked at home. This good practice has now become embedded in everyday practice. Parents are very positive about the individual learning diaries that children now keep up to date, and share with their teachers and their families. This approach has enabled children to take more responsibility for their own learning. It has also ensured that they felt valued and connected to their school community throughout the extended periods of learning at home.

The headteacher carried out surveys to seek the views of parents and children throughout the periods of remote learning. Staff appreciated these views and took them into consideration when they designed new tasks and activities for learning. Staff identified children who might benefit from additional help whilst learning at home. As a result, those children continued to have one-to-one sessions with teachers and support assistants by way of phone calls or video calls. These helpful interventions meant that all children were positively engaged in their learning and have made progress in literacy and numeracy over the last 18 months.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The whole school community has worked very well together to help the school to improve and grow, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Led effectively by the headteacher, the school has made clear progress in meeting each of the recommendations that were identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher and staff have developed an effective strategy for raising attainment. Teachers now make good use of a wide variety of sources to assess children's progress in learning. This includes class tests, check-ups, discussions with colleagues and standardised assessments. The headteacher maintains a helpful overview of the progress that all children are making in their learning. This approach, combined with teachers' sound knowledge of children, ensures that the headteacher has an accurate view of children's attainment, including those who need additional support. Teachers set targets for individual children who need some extra help in their learning. Children themselves have a genuine voice in creating these targets, which are also regularly discussed and reviewed with parents. The school's own robust data shows that all children have made progress in literacy and/or numeracy over the last year.

Staff have benefitted from taking part in professional learning in order to develop new approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This is making a difference for children. Staff are more confident in making professional judgements about children's learning, and are embracing fully the new resources and approaches to teaching and learning. Staff have worked very well together to ensure they have a shared understanding of national standards and expectations. They value regular opportunities to participate in activities with colleagues in other local small schools to discuss children's learning and progress, using digital technology to meet virtually. As a result of new teaching techniques, children across the school are confident to assess their own work. High quality feedback from teachers and support assistants helps them to identify what they need to do to improve. Children are making better progress as a result.

Pupil support assistants provide valuable and sensitive support for children in a variety of ways, for example, through one-to-one assistance, group support and individual reading, writing support. The active Parent Council has continued to support the school in important ways throughout the pandemic. Through fundraising and establishing helpful community partnerships, parents have played a key role in improving the school's and pre-5 unit's garden and outdoor play areas. Children's health and wellbeing is clearly enhanced through their enjoyment of learning outdoors daily, in attractive and well-resourced surroundings.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. 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. Argyll and Bute Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

Lesley A Allan
HM Inspector