

14 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 Sandness 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 virtual meeting with Sandness 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 acting 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 engagement.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

The local authority communicates regularly with both parents and staff to offer support, and provide updated guidance and procedures about COVID-19. This offers reassurance about the agreed protocols in relation to the pandemic.

An enhanced focus on wellbeing provides ongoing support to children, parents and staff. Staff maintained regular contact with families during lockdown helping to build strong bonds. Staff continue to respond, both formally and informally, to parents and families about any individual concerns and queries they may have about their children's wellbeing.

Throughout the first lockdown, school staff provided children and families with paper-based packs to support learning at home. At the start of the second lockdown, electronic devices were issued to families who required them. These enabled children to access online weekly learning grids and activities to support their learning. Open-ended activities supported families with more than one child to engage more easily in online learning. As a result of connectivity issues for some families, paper-based learning activities remained available. This ensured no child missed out on access to remote learning opportunities.

To support recovery and children's return to school after periods of remote learning, staff prioritised the importance of transitions from home to school. Staff also provided enhanced opportunities for children to learn outdoors. During this time, staff began to identify gaps in children's learning and provide targeted input to support progress.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Since the initial inspection, there have been a number of significant changes to staffing in the school. An acting headteacher and a new principal teacher have been appointed and, following two years with two classes, the school has reverted to being a one-class school.

Senior leaders and staff have made a positive start to improving the curriculum, such as using the local environment more to enhance children's learning experiences. As planned, and in order to support further improvement, staff should now work with all stakeholders to create a vision, values and aims which reflect the context of the school.

School staff have undertaken positive work to develop curriculum programmes for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. There is now scope to extend this to include all areas of the curriculum so that children can build on their prior learning more effectively.

Commendably, staff explore ways in which outdoor learning and sustainability can enhance children's learning experiences across the curriculum. Children are responding well to these opportunities to develop creativity and curiosity in their learning. Given the environment in which the school is situated, there is scope to continue to develop further outdoor learning opportunities so that children experience greater levels of challenge.

Teachers' skills in tracking and monitoring children's progress are improving. Teachers are beginning to track more effectively children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Children enjoy sharing achievements in school and at home through learning logs and homework tasks. Along with teachers, support staff enhance the learning of a number of children across the school.

[School Progress Reports – Shetland Islands Council](#)

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. They have also been making progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that the school needs some more time to implement fully its priorities for improvement. We have asked Shetland Islands Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress within one year of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform, parents/carers. Otherwise, Shetland Islands 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.

Dennise Sommerville
HM Inspector