

19 November 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

In August 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Drongan Primary School and Early Childhood Centre. The letter set out a number of areas for improvement which we agreed with the school and East Ayrshire Council. 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. The Care Inspectorate inspected the nursery class at the same time and that report will be available at www.careinspectorate.com.

Clear strategic direction, supported by robust self-evaluation, is needed to improve the work of the school. Senior leaders and all staff now require to work collaboratively to take forward the changes necessary to deliver successfully the school's improvement agenda.

The recently appointed headteacher is providing clear leadership and direction in taking the school forward since the last inspection. Staff, parents and partners speak positively about a changing culture with people feeling more involved in the life of the school. Senior leaders and staff share a sound understanding of the changes to practice required to ensure that the needs of all children are being met. Supported by the local education authority, the headteacher and staff are making good progress in addressing a number of the issues identified as points for action in the initial inspection report.

Steps have been taken to link more closely the school's vision, values and aims to reflect the school's local context. Senior leaders have involved all stakeholders in this process. The views of children, parents and partners have been actively sought. The refreshed vision, values and aims are displayed prominently in the school, in the Early Childhood Centre (ECC) and shared with stakeholders. Senior leaders are confident that this engagement is not only raising the profile of the school but also reaffirming its place at the heart of the Drongan community.

Views expressed through the pre-inspection questionnaire and in discussions with parents and partners indicate an improving picture of engagement. Staff speak positively about improved morale and being encouraged to work collaboratively with colleagues to engage in professional learning and share practice. The actions already taken to improve practice are being received well by stakeholders. There are indications of these having a positive impact, although staff recognise that developments are at early stages of implementation and still require to be embedded. At a strategic level, there is now a greater awareness of managing the pace of change in a way that ensures that agreed goals will be delivered and sustainable. Almost all staff feel that the school's vision, values and aims now underpins their work. They feel that the school is being well led and managed; a view equally shared by most parents. Leadership as a shared responsibility is being actively promoted. Staff are beginning to feel more empowered and are being encouraged to assume greater leadership roles and

responsibilities. There remains scope for staff to be involved further in leading and taking forward identified initiatives and priorities.

As the school continues to develop provision, senior staff should ensure that the school improvement plan for session 2019-20 accurately reflects the identified priorities. This will enable staff to consolidate and build on the issues already being addressed. An indication of the respective roles of staff in the delivery of these objectives will help to bring coherence and collective responsibility to whole school initiatives. With the emphasis on evaluating the impact of developments and continued collegiate working, staff will be well-placed to take the points for action forward and improve the consistency of practices across the school and ECC setting.

There is a need to address the inconsistencies in children’s learning through developing a shared understanding of the features of high quality learning and teaching. Across the school, action is required to increase the pace and challenge of learning to raise children’s attainment. This includes providing more opportunities for children to be active in leading their learning.

Across the ECC, there is now a shared emphasis on improving children’s communication and early language skills. There is a clear process to identify needs with support being successfully targeted. Children’s progress in this important area is monitored appropriately. Practitioners have benefited from sharing practice beyond the setting with visits to other early years establishments and participation in moderation activities within the cluster. Children across the setting enjoy better access to outdoor learning and they are increasingly able to manage risk well. Further work is needed to ensure a shared understanding of what makes effective learning in early years and ensure that staff can build on the emerging good practice.

In the primary school, practices are being developed to enhance the quality of learning and teaching. There remains a need to improve the consistency of children’s experiences across the school. An ‘Excellent Lesson’ overview has been launched to develop more consistent approaches to learning and teaching across the school. Staff have engaged in professional discussion around the key themes within this. As a result, there is a more coherent approach to the structuring of lessons across the school. Continued professional learning will help ensure all teachers develop a better understanding of how teaching methodologies contribute to high quality learning and appropriate challenge for all learners.

A more rigorous approach to the monitoring and evaluating of learning and teaching has been introduced and analysis of attainment data is helping staff to clarify attainment gaps. Data provided by the school indicates an improvement in children’s attainment for session 2018 – 2019 in numeracy and literacy at early, first and second levels. Senior managers use available data to identify children who are not achieving expected levels. As a result, a range of targeted interventions are now in place to help children overcome identified barriers. To further help children understand what they need to do to improve, all children would benefit from regular opportunities to review and discuss personal targets with their teacher.

Senior leaders and staff require to review all strategies and systems including their procedures to identify children requiring additional support. This will involve staff monitoring more rigorously the wellbeing and development of children and the appropriateness and impact of any interventions.

Senior leaders have undertaken an extensive review of procedures relating to the wellbeing and development of children. This includes generating a greater awareness of health and wellbeing as a shared whole school responsibility as well as ensuring that practices reflect current thinking. Together with the new school vision, values and aims, the launch of the Rights Respecting School and the Dyslexia Friendly School approach are encouraging a greater awareness of the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC).

Children are developing a better understanding of the wellbeing indicators and the importance of accepting personal responsibility. Most children indicate that they feel safe, with almost all children confirming that there is someone to whom they can speak should an issue arise. They feel that they are treated with respect by staff. Almost all children describe the school as helping them to grow in confidence and appreciate the importance of their personal health and wellbeing. However, there remains scope for the indicators to feature more strongly with children reflecting on their own sense of wellbeing. Most parents feel that children are being supported not only in their learning but also in terms of their emotional wellbeing. While the handling of bullying remains a concern for some parents, most parents express confidence in the school's procedures.

Across the ECC and primary, senior management have introduced procedures to identify children needing additional support, with evidence of these interventions having a positive impact. The introduction of Ayrshare is facilitating the sharing of information to support identified vulnerable children. Supported by professional learning, the practices surrounding record keeping and children's plans have improved. Senior staff should now focus on ensuring that children are more involved in the planning of their own targets and evaluating their progress in achieving them. All children would benefit from more opportunities to reflect on their wellbeing, development and targets in a more systematic and planned way within the context of their everyday learning. By using language that is stage appropriate, targets and the experience itself will become more relevant and meaningful for children.

In developing the curriculum there needs to be a clear emphasis on promoting the skills and attributes of children as learners. The curriculum should be planned to reflect more the school's local context.

Embedding the refreshed vision, values and aims for the primary and ECC will provide a strong platform for all future improvements. An important next step will be the creation of an aspirational curriculum rationale for both the primary and ECC that reflects fully Curriculum for Excellence.

Within the ECC setting, the curriculum framework is based on play and takes increasingly effective account of the interests of children. All practitioners understand the importance of wellbeing to children's learning and development. They have been using their developing understanding to explore and apply these in their floor book planning with children. ECC practitioners have benefited from working with P1 teachers to shape and develop an improved approach to transitions.

Partners speak positively about the increased opportunities they have to work in collaboration with the school. A range of visitors and learning visits in the local area continue to enrich children's experiences. Teachers and ECC practitioners should continue to develop approaches to encourage children to make links between what they are learning and employment and work in the local community and beyond.

Developing the curriculum remains an identified priority across the ECC and primary. Once a clear curriculum rationale is in place, senior leaders and other leaders of learning will require to monitor closely the impact of the curricular changes and the work being undertaken by teachers and other staff. This will help to ensure the delivery of a curriculum to reflect the needs of all children. This requires staff to increase the pace and challenge within children's learning. Broadening learning opportunities will support children in developing further their skills and confidence.

What happens next?

The school is making good progress in taking forward a number of the points for action identified in the original inspection visit. School staff now need time to evaluate the impact of these changes to ensure outcomes for children are continuing to improve. As part of their ongoing support, officers from East Ayrshire Council will review and report on progress before the end of the current school year. A member of HMI will join the review team. This report will inform Education Scotland's decision regarding further engagement. When such a decision is made, we will write to you again detailing the improvements the school has made and outlining any further action, agreed with East Ayrshire Council that we intend to take.

Charles Rooney
HM Inspector