

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 Achiltibuie 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 virtual meeting to the 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 the headteacher and local authority officer, the school and nursery class's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection. Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. At the time of the visit, supply staff also support children's learning due to staff absence.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

### **Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19**

In order to support staff, parents and others within the school community, local authority officers have provided valuable support. Their helpful advice, guidance and protocols have enabled staff to respond well to COVID-19 challenges and support children's wellbeing. The headteacher, together with staff and practitioners, continue to focus on the health and wellbeing of all. They provide support to each other, children and their families. This engagement has improved relationships within the school and its community. Despite COVID-19, staff and families work well together to help each other and the children to deal with and overcome the many challenges that arose during both lockdown and remote learning.

During the first lockdown, teachers made useful packs to support children's learning at home. At times, staff delivered these packs to homes. Parents and children with no access to digital technology at home were issued with school devices. Highland Council lead officers for digital support provided clear help for all staff through training, digital drop-in sessions and significant resources for staff and parents. Staff who needed extra help with digital learning found this to be of particular benefit. The headteacher also set up a virtual staffroom with weekly 'get together' times for all staff, which supported their health and wellbeing. Staff provided helpful opportunities for parents to discuss how and what their children's learning would look like during lockdown using digital technologies. Parents recognised that the children's learning day would be shorter, with time allocated in the afternoon for health and wellbeing activities. The school provided parents with useful timetabling information.

During the first lockdown, several children struggled to access online learning, either due to internet connection or due to other reasons. By the second lockdown, all children had digital devices. This increased the take up of online learning. However, a few children did not engage for various reasons. To help ensure that children attended, staff set up daily registers and children completed daily emotional checks. Where appropriate, the headteacher phoned

parents to check how children were. Staff offered one-to-one online teaching sessions to support children's learning. Uptake for these opportunities was mixed. To support a feeling of community, the headteacher ran supportive weekly 'meets' for all children alongside virtual playtimes. When children returned to school, staff followed government advice. They focused appropriately on supporting children's health and wellbeing. Staff also maintained a focus on developing further children's skills in numeracy and literacy. The school is also using external funding to provide extra teacher support for children in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher reported that children settled back quickly to school routines and accessed all curricular areas. Significant amounts of learning took place outdoors, to support COVID-19 mitigations. Staff identified gaps in children's learning. They are providing well-judged interventions to address these.

### **Progress with recommendations from previous inspection**

The headteacher has worked well to develop positive relationships with children, parents, partners and others within the school community. Together, they are reviewing and improving the vision, values and aims to reflect the school context. Together with staff and practitioners, he has improved the quality of teaching and the children's learning experiences. Children now make better use of the learning experiences on offer, including the local environment and surrounding outdoor areas. This is helping them to enhance their skills and knowledge in different curricular areas, for example, in mathematics and science.

Under the headteacher's leadership, staff and practitioners lead aspects of school and nursery class improvement to meet children's needs better. Children now have greater ownership of their own learning. They have increased responsibility, making choices and suggesting topics and interests. They are increasing their understanding of what they are learning and why. The pace of learning has improved and children are now making appropriate progress in line with their own stage of development. Staff now give children greater levels of challenge.

The headteacher has ensured that there are clear systems to track and monitor children's learning and progress. Information gathered is used to identify and support those children who need extra help. Teachers, support staff and practitioners enhance children's learning across the nursery and primary stages. The headteacher has ensured that all staff undergo relevant training in safeguarding to help keep children safe and protected from harm. Building work has also taken place to improve the nursery environment to increase children's safety and security. Parents are more involved in school life and in their children's learning. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, various arrangements are in place which enable parents to have a greater say in their children's learning and progress.

### What happens next?

Understandably, the school and nursery class have been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school and nursery class. Staff and practitioners are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed successfully the recommendations from the original inspection. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school and nursery class in connection with the original inspection. The Highland Council will continue to inform parents about the school's and nursery class's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Moira Allan  
HM Inspector