

8 February 2022

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 Gairloch 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 virtual meetings. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children in English and Gaelic Medium Education 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 headteacher and staff continue to respond to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as absences and periods of remote learning. As a result, the pace of change in a few areas of development has been impacted. Despite this, the school has made good progress in taking forward improvements from the original inspection.

Staff and parents describe how the experience of remote learning has increased further their sense of partnership and, as a result, families and the school are working more closely together. Teachers use digital technology well to enhance learning and engagement in English and Gaelic. Parents are positive about the support provided and the responsiveness of school staff.

Senior leaders and teachers are making effective use of a range of information to identify learning gaps in literacy, numeracy and Gaelic language across the school. They are planning for and supporting children's individual needs.

In both English and Gaelic Medium classes, children shared with staff how they had missed playing together, singing and participating in games and sports. In response, the school continues to provide events and activities focused on children's wellbeing and reconnection.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Senior leaders reviewed and revised the school vision, values and aims through discussions and consultation with all staff, parents and children. These better capture Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic (Learners) as an integral part of the school's identity and curriculum. The new headteacher provides effective leadership and clear direction. He has brought stability to the school during periods of significant change. The headteacher recognises that part of his professional development is to continue developing a deeper understanding of Gaelic Medium Education.

Through engagement in regular evaluation, staff better understand the school's successes and areas requiring further development. The headteacher is managing priorities and pace of change effectively. All staff are working together well to further develop and embed improvements across Gairloch Primary School.

The headteacher and staff are developing the curriculum on offer at Gairloch Primary School. Across the school, children are building their skills through motivating and relevant learning contexts, such as United Nations COP26 Climate Summit. They are regularly participating in outdoor learning and sustainable development education activities, for example, creating a climate change information display in the local community. COVID-19 has impacted on improvements the school had planned in connection with Developing the Young Workforce. However, staff are now re-establishing regular engagement with the local secondary school and business partners. This is supporting children to build on their knowledge and skills for life and the world of work.

Overall, the school is making good progress in improving learning, teaching and assessment in English and Gaelic. The headteacher and staff carefully reviewed children's pace of learning and lessons now take better account of children's needs and prior knowledge. Teachers and support staff are now providing activities set at the right level. Use of learning logs and effective feedback from teachers supports children to recognise their achievements and understand the next steps in their learning. Staff use assessment more effectively to plan and support children to make better progress in literacy and numeracy.

Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary has been particularly impacted by challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are identifying gaps in children's learning and a clear and well-informed recovery plan is being implemented. There are early signs of progress in re-establishing early learning and childcare provision through total immersion in Gaelic. Building work is under way to provide a new playroom and outdoor environment. The school reports children continue to make good progress in literacy and numeracy in both Gaelic and English Medium Education and a few children working in the senior class are exceeding nationally expected levels. The headteacher recognises that Gaelic Medium Education is a priority for continued further improvement to help children.

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 almost all of the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. They have addressed almost all 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. The Highland 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.

Lisa Marie McDonnell
HM Inspector