

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 Clarkston 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 the 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 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.

The school has managed a period of significant change in staffing while at the same time providing learning for children in the most challenging of circumstances. The acting headteacher was appointed in January 2021 when almost all children and staff were learning and working from home. Despite the many challenges faced by schools during the pandemic, she quickly identified the school's strengths and identified the needs of the community. She has provided strong supportive leadership and a clear direction for the school. Children, parents, and staff welcome her approach and comment very positively about the difference she is making to the school.

During remote learning, the views of children and parents were listened to and approaches were improved. The school remained open for a minority of children providing childcare and in-school learning for groups of children such as those whose parents are key workers. In addition, staff provided packs of learning materials and essential items to support children's learning at home. The school and wider community worked together as a whole to help each other during this challenging period. Together they all placed a high priority on the wellbeing of children, parents and staff. Digital technologies were needed to support learning and resources for families to access the internet were provided by a local business.

Since the last inspection, there are changes in both staff leading the school and classroom teachers. Commendably, since taking up post the headteacher has managed change very well and provided opportunities for staff to undertake professional learning. During the period of remote learning, the leadership team focussed on wellbeing, use of digital technologies, and learning and teaching. Children and staff absence due to COVID-19 restrictions continue to be a challenge. The leadership team put in place plans that they action quickly to support children's wellbeing and learning. Staff plan lessons together, which helps to keep classes and individual children on track if teachers are absent.

It is clear that the school has worked very effectively to focus on supporting children's wellbeing both during the period of remote learning and as children have returned to school buildings. In addition, the school has continued to make improvements to leadership, learning and teaching, and children's attainment. The acting headteacher prioritised responding to the

impact of COVID-19 on the school alongside responding to the recommendations from the previous inspection. The senior leadership team now have clear remits and areas of responsibility which they take forward very well. In addition, the nursery is now included in the work and life of the school. Approaches led by senior leaders ensure high quality experiences across the nursery and primary classes.

Overall, staff have improved approaches to monitoring children's progress in learning. This has supported them well when reviewing and identifying any gaps in children's learning resulting from the pandemic. They have a clear understanding of children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Parents commented very positively about the personal approach taken by the school at a difficult time for children and their families. They shared many examples of staff doing a lot more for the school community than was expected of them.

The acting headteacher identified the need to ensure that learning and teaching continues to be enjoyable, challenging and set at the right level of difficulty for each child. Staff have had a focus on ensuring teaching approaches are more consistent across classes and, as a result, children's learning is improving. Staff work very well together to plan learning and teaching, taking into account information about and gaps in children's knowledge and understanding. Children talk confidently about their learning and commented enthusiastically about different topics and themes they are learning. Children also highlighted how teachers supported them when they were learning new concepts, including access to recorded lessons. They also spoke about how teachers planned activities so they could reinforce their learning.

The school revisited the purpose of the curriculum and it is now more relevant for children. There is a strong focus on health and wellbeing and the local community. Whole school approaches across the curriculum are now in place and children's learning takes more account of what they already know. As a result, children make connections between their learning and skills required for real life. Teachers now plan together and children's progress is measured more accurately.

We are confident that the leadership team in post at the time of visit will continue to make improvements. However, we recognise that the acting headteacher and a minority of staff with important leadership roles are not permanent to the school. The local authority should now take steps to ensure stability in the leadership of the school to ensure that all improvements continue to focus on children's wellbeing, raise attainment and improve outcomes for children.

What happens next?

While the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have also been making positive progress in taking forward the areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise the improvement the school has made and we want to ensure that the school continues to improve. There have been significant changes in staffing and currently, there is no permanent headteacher. We have asked North Lanarkshire Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress within one year of the publication of this letter. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform parents/carers. Otherwise, North Lanarkshire 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.

Elizabeth C Montgomery
HM Inspector