

18 January 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 Achahoish 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 visit to Achahoish 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 staff and local authority officers 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 and families through COVID-19

Achahoish Primary School continues to be a warm and nurturing school at the heart of its unique community. At the time of the most recent visit in November 2021, there were six children across the primary stages. Most of the children were not pupils at the time of the original inspection. The headteacher is also the headteacher of Clachan Primary School.

Throughout the pandemic, the headteacher and staff have remained positive, finding creative solutions to support children and families. Connectivity challenges in the rural area mean that some children cannot easily access learning online at home. Staff have ensured that each family has access to a tablet computer. They also created paper-based learning packs for all children each week. This ensured that all children could engage in different types of meaningful learning at home during the periods of remote learning.

Teachers and support staff developed rapidly their skills in using digital technology in order to meet the needs of children. For example, children who benefit from extra help continued to receive one-to-one support during the periods of learning at home. Parents appreciated this helpful and flexible approach. Teachers who had to isolate at home were able to use technology very effectively to teach lessons to children in school. This has helped the school community to keep connected despite the challenges of the pandemic.

The health and wellbeing of children and families continues to be a key priority for staff. Building on practice started during the periods of remote learning, children benefit from daily opportunities to talk in school about their feelings.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Led very effectively by the headteacher, staff have worked very well together to make very good progress in all of the areas for improvement that were highlighted at the original inspection.

Teachers make good use of a wide variety of sources to assess children's progress in learning. This includes class tests, check-ups, discussions with colleagues and standardised assessments. The school's own data shows that all children have made progress in literacy and/or numeracy over the last year. During the second period of remote learning, most children demonstrated effective listening and talking skills in a range of ways, such as in video lessons and phone calls to teachers. Children are now keen to share their enthusiasm for reading. They have created their own attractive outside library so they can access books whenever they want. This is helping to improve their reading skills. When pupils returned to school in August 2020, staff worked hard to improve children's progress in writing. By the time of the second period of remote learning in January 2021, teachers had developed successful approaches to teaching writing skills online. As a result, most children can now produce pieces of writing that demonstrate their skills in using punctuation correctly and including interesting vocabulary. They are now using self and peer-assessment more regularly to improve their own work.

Staff are continuing to develop a curriculum that is relevant, motivating and unique to Achahoish Primary School. They use the outdoor environment and local community very effectively as a stimulus for teaching literacy and numeracy. For example, children recently produced attractive posters to publicise their community cake sale to raise funds for the McMillan Cancer charity. Children used their knowledge of shape, measure and angles successfully when creating outdoor cooking frame structures, building raised beds for the garden, and den building in the woodland.

The pandemic has accelerated teachers' aim of working more closely with their partner school. Weekly meetings provide helpful opportunities for teachers from both schools to plan learning and teaching together. Teachers now regularly deliver online lessons to groups of children from both schools. This is providing opportunities for children to learn alongside others of a similar age and stage. Children share their ideas and collaborate together on tasks and activities. This helps to ensure that learning and teaching is at the right level of difficulty for all children. Teachers are also using technology to share practice more widely with a group of staff from 10 small schools across Argyll and Bute. The commitment and dedication of all in the school community is helping Achahoish Primary School to continue to flourish and grow.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have addressed 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. Argyll and Bute 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.

Lesley A Allan
HM Inspector