

10 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

In November 2018, HM Inspectors published a letter on Tong Primary School and Sgoil Àraich (Nursery), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. 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 proposed by the headteacher. 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.

Continue to develop a clear direction to guide well-paced change and leadership at all levels of the school. All staff should be making robust and regular use of self-evaluation.

The headteacher is settling very well into post and is gaining the respect of parents, staff and children. She is giving clear direction to improving the school. The headteacher has led purposeful activities to increase the role of staff, parents, partners and children in leading change. This has included creating a meaningful vision, and set of values and aims for Tong Primary School and Sgoil Àraich. The pace of implementing change at the primary stages is increasing. Teachers are taking forward projects that are improving practice in their classrooms. Children are members of the pupil council, as well as newly established focus groups. Teachers need to continue to increase their role and independence in evaluating their practice against national standards. In the sgoil àraich, practitioners work well together. Many of them are new to post and are embarking on professional learning to assist them in their roles. They have made a few changes that are enhancing the quality of children's experiences. The headteacher should continue with her plans to prioritise providing further valuable support and direction to practitioners. This will enable practitioners to build confidence in improving further the playrooms in which children learn through Gaelic and English.

Give very prompt attention to developing the curriculum to meet national expectations, initially prioritising the planning of literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. This should ensure that children build appropriately on their knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Children need to be aware of their own progress and next steps in learning.

The headteacher and teachers have started to develop the curriculum to be more in line with national expectations. They have worked with parents, partners and children to agree what is important to be part of children's learning, while working within national guidelines. Teachers have developed plans in almost all areas of the curriculum to show what children's progress should look like. They should accelerate having a plan of what children should be learning in physical education. Teachers should continue to develop a shared understanding of what children will learn through projects and in separate lessons. This should ensure children's learning covers all areas of the curriculum, and clarifies how skills for learning, life and work,

including digital technology, are being taught. Across the sgoil àraich and primary school, teachers and practitioners of Gaelic Medium Education have a strong understanding of immersion. In the sgoil àraich, practitioners are better at responding to children's interests. All practitioners have a clearer focus on literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Across the school, practitioners and teachers need to engage consistently in conversations with children about their learning and progress. At the primary stages, the older children are at an early stage of gathering evidence of their progress, from which they can evaluate their own learning. This should be extended to include all children, and support them in reviewing and evaluating their learning.

Include the further development of Gaelic Medium Education in the strategic planning of the school. The learning of Gaelic, as a second language in English Medium, needs to result in children making better progress. Children would benefit from an increased use of Gaelic in the daily life and learning of the school.

The school's planning for improvement is taking better account of Gaelic, with staff continuing to show strong leadership. The free hours available to parents for early learning and childcare has been extended to Gaelic Medium Education. It is being staffed by those who can deliver total immersion, with professional learning being made available to them. All children in English medium education are more regularly learning Gaelic. Staff should make more use of the National Benchmarks for Gaelic (Learners) to help children attain expected standards by primary 7. Children need to be more aware of the benefits that learning Gaelic affords them, including in helping them to secure employment on their island and beyond. Staff, led by the headteacher, have increased the use of Gaelic within the school.

Improve learning and teaching. Staff should develop a shared understanding of the features of high-quality learning and teaching. Action is required to make learning more engaging, based on the needs of individuals, and with increased pace and challenge.

Across the school, children are self-motivated and eager to learn. They show high levels of responsibility when working individually and in small groups. Projects, such as 'being excited about reading' are increasing children's engagement in literacy. In the sgoil àraich, children's curiosity for the outdoors is fostered by their new play area. This enables them to be physically active as they enjoy experimenting with natural resources. Across the school, children are supported well in their learning. They receive additional help as required. Teachers are more consistently sharing with children the purpose of their learning and how to be successful. They give children some helpful feedback on how to improve their writing. Teachers have worked together to look at the features of effective learning and teaching. They should continue with their plans to detail this in a policy, which also includes assessment and immersion.

Raise attainment in all areas of learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Staff need to make better use of ongoing assessment to ensure children achieve as highly as possible.

The headteacher and staff, have taken positive action to help children secure better progress in literacy and numeracy through the medium of Gaelic and English. At the primary stages, most children achieve expected levels of attainment in reading and writing English, and in

numeracy. Almost all children achieve expected levels in all aspects of Gàidhlig, and in listening and talking in English. Teachers are not yet assessing across all curricular areas. Children who require additional support with their learning make appropriate progress. The headteacher ably supports teachers to analyse a range of assessment information ensuring effective additional support for learning is put in place. She has introduced meaningful discussions with teachers about children's progress. Whilst this needs to be embedded further, it is helping teachers make more reliable judgements about the Curriculum for Excellence levels that children are achieving. The headteacher maintains an overview of children's participation in a range of clubs and activities to support their wellbeing. A next well-judged step would be to focus on the skills children are developing and relate this to national wellbeing indicators. In the sgoil àraich, children enjoy their time in the playrooms. They are developing early literacy and numeracy skills well through the medium of Gaelic and English. Practitioners need to build their understanding of the curriculum to assist them in planning challenging, high-quality experiences.

What happens next?

The school has made some progress since the original inspection. We will liaise with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar regarding the school's capacity to improve. We will return to carry out a further inspection of the school within a year of the publication of this letter. We will discuss with the council the details of this inspection. When we return to inspect the school, we will write to you as parents informing you of the progress the school has made.

Joan C. Esson
HM Inspector