

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 Dunoon 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 virtual meeting to Dunoon 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 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

Dunoon Primary School is located in a renovated B listed building. The renovation was completed in November 2020 and received a commendation in the Scottish Design Awards 2021. The completion of the refurbishment was delayed by the onset of COVID-19. This undoubtedly added further challenge to an already complex situation.

During the first period of remote learning, staff focused on supporting the welfare of children and their families. The headteacher provided twice weekly welfare calls for vulnerable learners and offered direct support to children and their families. The school provided learners with learning packs and digital resources. Parental feedback was positive about the learning resources supplied. Staff decided that the main learning focus during this period should be on deepening existing learning. Teachers regularly checked on children in their classes to see how well they were coping with their learning activities. They discussed with members of the senior leadership team how well children were engaging with their learning and where further support was needed. The headteacher was part of the leadership team that ran the local hub at Dunoon Grammar School. She managed the free school meal provision and delivered meals with other school staff, enabling her to check in with many families. She credits this regular contact with supporting and enhancing relationships between families and staff in Dunoon Primary School. When this period ended, most children settled well back into school life. Staff continued to provide home learning for those children who were shielding. This included many of the children who attend the Learning Centre.

The learning and teaching focus on the return to school buildings was directed towards supporting children's wellbeing. Staff also prioritised literacy and numeracy, so that they could address any gaps in children's learning. Staff were aware at the end of the first period of remote learning that another might follow and undertook a considerable amount of professional learning about the use of digital classrooms. The local authority digital team supported this learning well. All staff also undertook training in dealing with trauma. Staff used this time to prepare for a possible second period of remote learning by setting up online

classrooms and working with their classes so that children were confident in the use of digital technology.

During the second period of remote learning, staff had a clear focus on supporting progress in learning and developed systems to monitor daily attendance. Staff were confident in the delivery of online lessons and all children had a digital device which they had learned how to use. There were regular online staff meetings where the welfare of children was the priority. Throughout remote learning, the senior leadership team remained in regular, planned contact with families to offer support. Parents were kept up-to-date about school activity through a variety of social media platforms. Learning plans for each stage in the school were provided weekly to families. As a result of parental feedback, the school introduced 'screen-free Wednesdays' and suggested activities for the whole family to do together. The pupil and eco councils continued to meet virtually in digital classrooms. Pupil support assistants worked with small groups of children to support them in addressing gaps in their understanding of literacy and numeracy.

Since the return to school buildings, the focus has been on nurture and recovery, and maximising the skills developed during the periods of school closure such as the increased and more sophisticated use of digital platforms. In addition, staff are continuing to build on the links between the school and the local community which were strengthened. Teachers continue to employ the streamlined planning and moderation processes which were introduced before the pandemic. During the second period of remote learning, staff were more able to assess children's learning and identify where children would benefit from additional support or challenge. Staff in the Learning Centre have undertaken professional learning relating to non-verbal communication. All staff continue to develop their professional learning in nurture and adverse childhood experiences.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The headteacher, senior leaders and staff have made considerable progress towards addressing the areas for improvement outlined in the inspection report. The local authority has also provided high levels of support, particularly in relation to professional learning. The senior leadership team has developed school-wide systems to promote consistency and coherence at every stage in Dunoon Primary School.

Pre-pandemic, the acting headteacher was appointed to the permanent position. She restructured management responsibilities and appointed two principal teachers who joined the principal teacher already in post. Each have distinct and complementary remits in areas such as curriculum leadership, outdoor learning and wellbeing. Teachers also lead on aspects of the curriculum such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, numeracy and literacy. In addition, teachers have individual responsibility for areas such as coordinating support for newly-qualified teachers, school improvement and children's rights. Children now have many leadership opportunities through the 'Clan system' and through membership of various school committees. These committees regularly issue questionnaires for their peers, including during the second period of remote learning. These leadership opportunities across the school sit within a structure of regular consultation, action and feedback. All these developments support strategic and well-informed change.

The headteacher has led a drive towards consistency and coherence in children's experiences of learning. The senior leadership team regularly monitors programmes of learning and teaching, and agrees areas of development with class teachers. The headteacher has led a focus on how well children are learning in areas such as literacy and numeracy. Teachers help children to apply what they have learned in one lesson in other contexts, for example, practising numeracy skills in a project about local rivers. Teachers also work together regularly, as well as with colleagues in other schools, to ensure that they share an understanding of what to expect from children at different stages of their learning. A principal teacher keeps an overview of where all children are in their learning across the school. This supports regular discussions between teachers and senior leaders about the progress children are making in their learning and whether they require additional support. Senior leaders have developed a recovery plan to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on pupils' attainment.

The whole school focus on the health and wellbeing of children and their families throughout the experience of COVID-19 has helped to improve practice which promotes nurture, mutual respect and increased opportunities for children to express their views. Staff and families have worked together to support children. The school has a stronger focus on children's rights. As a result, children have more confidence that their views are listened to and can bring about change in Dunoon Primary School.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. 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.

Jacqueline Gallagher
HM Inspector