

22 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 Tong Primary School and Sgoil Àraich¹ 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 Tong Primary School and Sgoil Àraich. 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

The headteacher and staff feel very well supported by the local authority in setting up arrangements to continue learning during COVID-19 restrictions. Local authority officers' reassurances on applying guidance and protocols for the pandemic were received well. The headteacher and staff have taken forward very positive developments to support children's health and wellbeing. Children have received attention, care and regular contact from staff during periods of lockdown. This has resulted in children's very high engagement with learning through the use of digital technology and, as appropriate, when attending designated learning hubs.

Throughout periods of lockdown, staff provided children and families with a range of learning activities through the medium of Gaelic and English. They ensured children could access learning by providing paper-based resources and digital devices. Staff taught children using digital technology. This included working with supported individual and small groups of children to provide more personalised support. Teachers in Gaelic Medium Education had daily sessions to help children maintain fluency in the language. They also gave additional valuable support to parents who were not speakers of Gaelic. This promoted parents' confidence in supporting their child during the period of with remote learning. All children benefitted from weekly sessions with the digital platform, e-Sgoil. These sessions promoted a range of motivating situations in which to learn indoors and outdoors, use Gaelic and make connections with Gaelic culture, heritage and music.

Children in the sgoil àraich took part in storytelling sessions, singing songs, literacy, numeracy and baking activities. Since returning to the sgoil àraich, staff are sustaining supportive relationships with parents. They meet and greet them at the beginning and end of the day outdoors.

Staff made very regular use of a digital tool to communicate with parents, check on children's progress in learning and share children's successes. Parents found this approach helped them to have meaningful conversations with their children on learning. Parents of those in

Gaelic Medium Education felt that this encouraged children's use of Gaelic in the home. On returning to school, staff are maintaining this digital approach as part of building on what worked well during lockdown.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

The headteacher and staff continue to drive well-paced change to improve the school. They have done so whilst introducing new staff to the school. The headteacher has increased the number of external ways of measuring and recognising the school's successes through achieving accreditation awards. For example, Rights Respecting School.

Staff have a good overview of children's learning needs, which they are using to plan their curriculum. Teachers have had a clear focus on improving skills in literacy and numeracy through the medium of Gaelic and English. The Gaelic group, Comann na Gàidhlig are providing after-school support to children in Gaelic Medium Education. Teachers have used a range of assessments that show children are making positive progress in their learning. Staff are also benefitting from having curriculum pathways that are clearer on children's progress in knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school.

In the sgoil àraich, the headteacher and practitioners have made purposeful changes to the way they plan for children's learning. Children's interests and prior learning are beginning to inform experiences, spaces and interactions. Those in Gaelic Medium Education have a good balance of total immersion activities led by adults. Children's confidence is increasing in speaking and singing Gaelic in social situations and routines. Practitioners engage well with children during immersion play. They provide rich commentary in Gaelic, whilst promoting children's curiosity. Children learning through English and Gaelic are increasing the range of learning through play, exploration and taking risks outdoors. They do this with the expertise of partners. The headteacher has given a clear steer to improving the sgoil àraich. She has compiled very useful policies to which the staff refer.

The headteacher continues to lead by example in her use of spoken and written Gaelic. The numbers in Gaelic Medium Education are growing. Children's learning of Gaelic as an additional language in the English Medium classes is now more meaningful. This learning begins in the sgoil àraich through songs and common phrases. A singing tutor provides a rich dimension to enhance the curriculum. Staff use events like Là na Gàidhligⁱⁱ to help children be more aware of the benefits that learning Gaelic affords them.

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 the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff are addressing 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. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 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.

Joan C. Esson
HM Inspector

ⁱ Sgoil Àraich is the Gaelic word for early learning and childcare setting. In this school, the term is used to include provision through Gaelic and English.

ⁱⁱ Là na Gàidhlig celebrates Gaelic – Gaelic Day.