

23 April 2013

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Mun's Primary School
Argyll and Bute Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including the use of a curriculum planning tool, the engagement of staff in improving the school, the nurture support provided to vulnerable children, and learning progressions to secondary school. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the school children feel happy and safe. They have positive relationships with staff and with each other and are proud of their school. Almost all children behave well and work hard. In most lessons children are given interesting activities which help them to develop their skills. Children can sometimes choose what they want to learn about but they need to have more influence on how they learn. They have appropriate opportunities to evaluate and think about how they can improve their work. Children work well together in pairs, groups and teams. Those at P1-P3 would benefit from more opportunities to learn through investigation and play. Throughout the year, teachers enhance children's learning through thematic days, trips and special events. A P7 World War II evacuee day helped children to understand and express how evacuees may have felt. The school grounds are well developed and children benefit from positive experiences in outdoor learning. Children in P2, P5 and P7 develop important skills of leadership and responsibility by running the school book club, stationery shop and healthy eating café. They are developing their understanding of the needs of others through a range of enterprising fundraising activities.

Across the school, most children are making appropriate progress with their learning. Children enjoy reading and confidently discuss character and plot in novels. They express themselves well in writing, particularly when it is linked to interesting topics. Teachers are making good use of mathematical games to teach children how to use money. Children in P5 are good at using what they know to solve challenging and unfamiliar mathematical problems. Children at other stages would benefit from opportunities to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum. High-attaining children are capable of developing numeracy skills more quickly than they are doing at

present. Children are developing secure skills in aspects of science. They showed a sound understanding of their faith during lessons for Catholic Education Week. A number of other curriculum areas need to be more carefully planned to enable children to make appropriate progress through the stages. A wide range of out-of-class activities has had a positive impact on children's involvement in sport and their awareness of their own wellbeing. Children are learning about democracy through taking part in pupil council elections.

How well does the school support children to develop and learn?

Class teachers know children's needs well overall. They help children to learn by giving them activities and support in small groups. The school's calm atmosphere and staff commitment to care and inclusion supports vulnerable children and those who experience difficulties within their learning. Learning activities are often not challenging enough for high-attaining children. In many lessons, the pace of learning is too slow because children spend too long listening to the teacher. Staff have appropriate arrangements in place to identify children who might require extra help. Learning assistants provide very effective support. They run special programmes including a nurture programme which helps a few children to settle and prepare to learn. Staff should involve parents in planning for children who need additional support. The role of the support for learning teacher needs to be broadened. It needs to include a stronger emphasis on supporting other teachers to meet children's learning needs.

Children have experiences in a broad range of curriculum areas. Teachers are using Curriculum for Excellence guidance to plan their lessons. However, the school's progress in using Curriculum for Excellence to improve learning and achievement has been too slow. There is not a clear plan in place for how the curriculum will develop over time. Staff have built a local dimension into the curriculum by using local resources and partners such as the church and the Burgh Hall to enhance learning opportunities. They have begun to plan learning opportunities which link curriculum areas. For example, children enjoyed a range of experiences during an eco-week. Teachers need to plan learning experiences in social studies more carefully to develop children's skills, and knowledge about contemporary issues in a global society. Staff have not yet fully developed effective approaches to planning and assessing children's progress. This has resulted in weaknesses in children's progress in a few curriculum areas. Children are well supported when they enter the school from the nursery by good communication between staff. Staff have built strong partnerships with Dunoon Grammar School which aim to ensure that children build on what they know when they move to secondary school.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

In recent years, the school has made some improvements, for example, in how well staff support children. The school's improvement plan has supported changes to the teaching of literacy, which have begun to improve children's writing. However, teachers do not have a clear understanding of how children's learning is progressing through Curriculum for Excellence levels. The headteacher has drawn on her own experience to evaluate the school's performance. The informal approaches to monitoring the work of the school are not regular or focused enough to develop a

thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher has a visible presence around the school. She has effectively shared her personal commitment to the inclusion of all children. She now needs to use local and national guidance to give staff stronger leadership in developing the curriculum. The remit of the new principal teacher needs to be developed to have an impact on the work of the school.

This inspection of your school found the following key strengths.

- The ethos of care, inclusion and respect.
- Support for children to ensure continuity in learning as they move from P7 to secondary school.
- Outdoor learning activities which develop children's knowledge of the local and natural environment.

We discussed with staff and the education authority how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Improve the pace of learning to ensure appropriate challenge for all children.
- Develop the curriculum to provide planned, progressive learning experiences across all curriculum areas.
- Develop robust systems for evaluating the work of the school and for planning for improvement.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the school needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Our Area Lead Officer along with the local authority will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We shall ask the local authority to provide us with a progress report within a year, and decide at that point whether a further inspection is required.

Jacqueline Sinclair
Managing Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/StMunsPrimarySchoolArgyllandBute.asp>

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