

20 August 2013

Dear Parent/Carer

Southend Primary School and Pre-5 Unit Argyll and Bute Council

Recently, as you may know, I inspected your child's school. During my visit, I talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. I 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 me the school's successes and priorities for improvement. I looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including outdoor learning, developing approaches to active learning, children's voice and relationships. As a result, I was able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children learn and achieve well. Children in the pre-5 unit are happy and settled. They enjoy following their own interests and staff have begun to use children's views to help inform planning. I have asked staff to continue to develop these approaches in order to motivate and engage the children fully. Children in P1-P3 are motivated by their topic work and enjoy practical opportunities to develop their skills in more active ways. Children are interested and concentrate well when they learn in this way. Their imagination is stimulated through the excitement of finding out about, for example, knights and castles. Children in P4-P7 engage well with their peers and enjoy lessons best when they are relevant to real-life situations. They were eager to explore the local caves and try 'Ogham' writing as part of their current focus on the life and times of St Columba. Several children are contributing to the local community celebrations. Children are clear about setting and reviewing a personal and academic target on a termly basis. They are confident reflecting on their achievements and take a pride in recording and sharing them. Children say they learn best when they have quality feedback on what they need to do to improve. This needs to become a more consistent feature of children's learning. Older children are developing leadership skills through participation in pupil council and eco-committee. The school recognises that there is scope to increase these opportunities to include all children and make the focus more challenging. Children are developing confidence in presenting their learning to a range of audiences through a variety of activities including music and drama performances, special lunches and community events. Children say they feel relationships could at times be better and need help to develop skills to resolve conflict when it arises.

Children in the pre-5 unit are making satisfactory progress in their early language and mathematics. They listen and follow instructions well. They enjoy singing with the primary school children during music lessons. They enjoy looking at books and listening to stories. Children need more opportunities to count during their play and to

develop their skills in a range of mathematical situations, including collecting and handling simple data. Children at the primary stages are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. Almost all in P1 know and apply their phonic skills well to try and read unfamiliar words. By P3 they are reading well, with fluency and expression. Children continue to develop more advanced higher-order reading skills as they progress through the school. There has been a focus on writing in school and children are able to write for a variety of purposes. A few children could progress at a faster pace. Across the school, children are confident in written calculations but need to become faster at mental calculations. A few children need to develop a wider range of strategies to solve mathematical problems. By P5-P7 children are eager to apply their skills and understanding of mathematics to new and unfamiliar situations, for example, using scale to make models of the 'Curragh' that will be used in the upcoming pageant. Children understand the importance of exercise in keeping them fit and healthy. Older children participate in a range of clubs to develop skills and interest in sport provided by Active Schools. Children are proud of their Eco-Schools Scotland green flags and their work in the school garden. They plant and harvest vegetables that they use in school or sell, with the proceeds going to charity.

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

Staff know children and their families well. Staff working with children in the pre-5 unit keep an interesting book of photographs with details of the activities children enjoy, and share these with parents. Staff now need to use their observations of learning more effectively to monitor children's progress. At times children in the pre-5 unit would benefit from greater levels of challenge in their learning by taking better account of what children can already do. Across the primary stages, staff regularly review and refresh the curriculum to take account of Curriculum for Excellence. They plan a broad range of learning experiences, often through interdisciplinary topics, that relate well to children's interests or local community life. Staff consult children about what they know, build increasingly well on their prior learning and involve them in planning assessments. This allows children to learn in creative and interesting ways. Staff plan opportunities for children to apply their literacy and numeracy skills through these topics. They recognise that in moving forward, they need to ensure children continue to make suitable progress in all subject areas. They know they need to review the health and wellbeing programme. Children would benefit from using a wider range of information and communications technology more effectively and regularly to support their learning. All children benefit from high-quality singing lessons and the school choirs achieve well in local competitions, for example, the Kintyre music festival. Parents run the weekly youth club and help increase children's outdoor experiences by raising funds for Forest Schools projects. Staff meet the learning needs of primary children well. They take good account of potential barriers to learning, and work well to ensure children learn in a way that best suits their needs. Staff identify children who need additional support in their learning and work effectively with other agencies to provide help and challenge as required. They involve parents and children in reviewing specific plans. There is scope to improve how these targets are developed and shared with children. Children moving into the pre-5 unit are supported well in making the transition. Pre-school children begin to visit and work with P1 before moving and are enthusiastic participants in a weekly music session with P1-P3 children. Children moving to secondary have a good range of opportunities to meet other children and develop friendships through a range of sporting and residential

experiences. Staff share information regarding children's progress and learning needs.

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

Argyll and Bute Council has been supportive in providing a recent review to help the school evaluate its work. As a result, the headteacher is fully aware of the strengths and needs of the school. The headteacher has worked well with staff to develop approaches to tracking children's progress in aspects of language and mathematics. Staff have been encouraged to share assessment standards with teachers in neighbouring schools. Developments in assessment this year have been guided through the work of the teacher learning community. The headteacher consults all stakeholders about identifying aspects for improvements. The recently established playgroup session in school provides play opportunities for children under five. This is well received by parents. Children were very happy to have their views taken into account and can talk about the changes made as a result, including more learning outdoors. The headteacher recognises that now is the time to revisit the vision for the school given its changing roll. She is eager to involve children and parents fully in developing new approaches to the life and ethos of the school. With continued support from the authority for the pre-5 unit, the school has the capacity to continue to improve.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Polite, confident children who want to learn.
- Children's achievements in expressive arts.
- The warm and welcoming ethos of the school.
- Commitment of the headteacher to develop partnerships with the local community to enhance children's learning experiences.

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

- Develop more challenging learning experiences for children in the pre-5 unit.
- Develop consistent approaches to providing quality feedback for children in order that they know what they need to do to improve.
- Continue as planned to develop children more in making decisions about learning and the life of the school.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The local authority will inform parents about the school's progress as part of the authority's arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of its schools.

Mary Ann Hagan
HM 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/SouthendPrimarySchoolArgyllandBute.asp>

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