

3 March 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Port Charlotte Primary School and Pre-5 Unit  
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 children's involvement in planning their own learning, and the use of the interesting local area. 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?**

We found that, across the school, children are well behaved and display great consideration for each other. They warmly welcome visitors and are clearly very proud of their school and community. There is a strong family ethos in the school. Overall, children are motivated and interested in their learning. In the pre-5 unit, children are happy and familiar with nursery routines. Staff make good use of floor books and discussions to capture children's ideas and develop their interests. Commendably, children from the pre-5 unit join children in P1 to plan and lead their own learning as part of their weekly 'plan, do and review' sessions. At the primary stages, older children take responsibility for their own learning as part of their 'Endeavour' and 'Investigate, Create, Communicate' projects. These projects help children to become more confident. As part of these projects, older children appreciate the opportunities they have to identify new, challenging learning targets. Children benefit from the opportunities they have to evaluate the quality of their own work against the helpful targets they set with guidance from their teachers. Children respond well when they work in pairs and in groups. In a few lessons, it is not always clear to children what they are learning about and how they can achieve success. Across the school, children benefit from opportunities to take on leadership roles on different committees and groups. The headteacher recognises the need to increase opportunities such as these and, as a result, has re-established the school's pupil council. The newly appointed playground and lunchtime 'happy helpers' are having a very positive impact on behaviour in the playground and dining hall. The new headteacher has improved the way the school celebrates children's achievements. Children in the pre-5 unit and school like the 'clan system' and the 'star of the week' certificates given at assemblies.

Children in the pre-5 unit are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. The youngest children are becoming more confident in making their needs known. They enjoy looking at books and can share with adults why they prefer particular ones. Children engage in different early writing activities and there are good examples in their learning logs and on wall displays. Relevant contexts such as 'taking the register' help children develop their early reading and numeracy skills. Older children can recognise and name a few two-dimensional shapes. Across the primary classes, children are making satisfactory progress across their learning. Staff have improved the way they teach reading and writing. Consequently, children are making better progress in these areas. Older children engage well with a range of books as part of the school's reading programme and confidently discuss the writing styles of their favourite authors. By the time children reach P7, they are able to write in a number of identified styles including newspaper reports, diary entries and poems. Older children are aware of their learning targets in reading and writing and this is helping them improve in these areas. In numeracy and mathematics, children at the early stages use positional language correctly to interpret pirate treasure maps. By P7, children display good skills in number, money and measurement. Advanced mathematical theories and practices are in place to support children who are capable of additional challenge. We have asked staff across the school to increase the opportunities children have to improve their skills in mental calculation. Across the school, children are increasing their understanding of the importance of healthy eating and exercise. Children at the middle stages can describe the different food groups. Children's skills in science and technologies need further development. We have asked staff to ensure that they have consistently high expectations of children across all areas of their learning.

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

In the pre-5 unit and across the school, most staff provide high standards of care and support for individual children. Staff in the pre-5 unit work in partnership with parents and a range of professionals to meet the individual needs of children. Staff record significant steps in learning to help them identify what children need to learn next. They now need to ensure that these next steps are addressed. Joint play and learning sessions with P1 provide very positive and appropriately challenging learning experiences for children. Across the school, children requiring additional support with learning have their needs very well met. Staff are quick to identify children who may benefit from extra support and work very well with a range of professionals and specialists including learning support staff, the educational psychologist, and the speech and language therapist. The learning support teachers and assistants work well with groups and individual children. We have asked the school to review how it consults children and parents when compiling individual education plans. This will ensure plans appropriately build on children's strengths. In the majority of classes at the primary stages, children's needs are met. Most staff work hard to provide contexts that make learning more relevant and interesting for children. In a few lessons, there are children who find activities too easy and who could learn at a faster pace. Staff need to ensure they plan lessons and activities which meet the wide range of needs and different stages in particular classes. Parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their children's learning, for example, through supporting reading activities in class and participation in learning events throughout the year.

The curriculum in the pre-5 unit is based appropriately on play and is broad and balanced. Staff are very responsive to children's interests and plan suitably appropriate learning contexts. They take very good account of their local area to enrich children's learning. In the primary classes, children benefit from well-planned topics that help them make meaningful links across their learning. In the best examples, these topics reflect well the local area. For example P6/7's recent topic, 'Changing life in Islay' enabled children to compare many aspects of life in Islay now with the way it was in the past. The school has made a good start to developing programmes of work for literacy and numeracy. It now needs to extend this across all areas of the curriculum to ensure children develop appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding, and make suitable progress over time. Staff should continue to build on the successful start they have made to engage with children and parents in the development of the curriculum. We found that the school demonstrates very strong practice in the way in which it supports children as they enter P1. As a result, children make very successful transitions to P1. Staff ensure that children are supported well as they move on to S1 at Islay High School. Good arrangements are in place to ensure children are familiar with future classmates, such as the annual residential trips for P6 and P7 pupils in the Islay High School cluster.

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

The headteacher took up post in November 2014, at a time of significant changes for the school community. She is approachable and welcoming, and has worked hard to foster positive relationships with children, parents and staff. In her very short time in post, she has quickly established a strong agenda for improvement and has already effected notable improvements. She has identified key aspects for improvement and has put plans in place to address these areas. With her support, staff are beginning to recognise what the school does well and what it needs to improve. We have asked staff to take prompt action to improve the way they monitor and track children's progress to ensure children achieve as highly as possible. Across the school, staff work effectively together. They are very supportive of the headteacher and are keen to bring about necessary improvements in the school. They particularly value the strong leadership and direction demonstrated by the headteacher and believe this will help them to improve outcomes for all children. The headteacher is encouraging staff to take on more leadership roles which will help improve the school at a brisker pace. The headteacher has also improved how the school involves children and parents in identifying areas for improvement. During the inspection, children spoke very positively about the ideas they have put forward to make the school better.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Well-behaved children who are proud of their school and community.
- Strong partnership working to support children who have difficulties with their learning.
- Effective use of the local area to provide interesting and relevant learning experiences for children.
- The new headteacher's commitment to improving learning outcomes for all children.

We discussed with staff and Argyll and Bute Council how they might continue to improve the school and pre-5 unit. This is what we agreed with them.

- Improve consistency in learning and teaching approaches across the school.
- Improve the curriculum to meet children's needs more effectively.
- Continue to develop strategies to monitor and track children's progress.

### **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. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Argyll and Bute Council will inform parents about the progress.

Jackie Maley  
HM Inspector

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

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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