

25 August 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Columba'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 school ethos, developments in reading and how well the school is supporting children learning English as an additional language. 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?

Children learn and achieve well at St Columba's Primary School. They are happy and proud of their school. They benefit from being part of a very caring ethos built on strong Catholic values. Almost all children say that they feel safe and well cared for in school. Across the school, children enjoy their learning. They work well in pairs and groups and are benefiting from more active approaches to learning. We have asked teachers to build on this and find more ways for children to lead learning and engage in activities that help them to think more for themselves. Children are beginning to think about their progress and what they need to do to improve. Their personal learning plans are helping them to do this. We have asked the school to provide more opportunities for children to set their own targets and reflect on their strengths and next steps in learning. Children are extending their learning and developing new skills through a wide range of opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. They are gaining confidence through performances as part of the Gaelic choir and school shows such as *Snow White and the Eight Dwarves*. This year, children in P1 and P2 participated in the Highlands and Islands Music and Dance Festival singing in English, Gaelic and Polish to reflect their diverse school community. Children are achieving well through regular participation in a range of sporting events and competitions including shinty, football, rugby, athletics, bowling and Scottish country dancing. Children enjoy taking on responsibilities as clan captains, members of the eco committee or pupil council. Clan missions are providing stimulating contexts for children to become involved in the work of the school. Recently, children in each clan enjoyed creating a character for one of the new school values and producing a short film to illustrate the meaning of that value. The school has developed strong links with the local community and parish. Children make a positive contribution to special

events at St Columba's Cathedral and to community events such as the Winter Festival and the Polski Fling. Children's achievements are recognised well. The school now needs to ensure that children are more aware of the important skills for learning, life and work that are being developed by this range of experiences.

Overall, children are making good progress in their learning in literacy and numeracy. New approaches to teaching reading are having a positive impact on children's enjoyment and understanding of the texts that they read. At all stages, children write regularly for a range of purposes and receive helpful and focused feedback on their writing. This is helping them to improve. They are able to apply their literacy skills well in different areas of their learning, for example, finding information and making notes about Matisse in art. Across the school, pupils are developing confidence in both mental and written mathematical calculations. They can interpret data well and use information from tables or texts to form bar graphs. Overall, there is scope for children in the upper stages to be making better progress in mathematics. Children are progressing well in health and wellbeing. Across the school, children show a good understanding of the benefits of being physically active and the importance of healthy food choices to good health. They also show a sound awareness of the importance of wellbeing and positive relationships. Staff now need to become more confident in assessing and tracking children's progress in learning in order to continue to raise attainment.

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

Across the school, staff support children well. The school has a welcoming and inclusive ethos. Children benefit from very positive relationships with staff. Children also support each other well. For most of the time, children are appropriately challenged by the learning planned for them. Tasks and activities are motivating and there is a purposeful and hardworking atmosphere. In a few lessons, there is scope to provide more challenging work and a brisker pace of learning. Children who have English as an additional language are well supported and are making good progress in their learning. At all stages, children are offered a broad and balanced range of learning experiences in line with national Curriculum for Excellence guidance. The school is continuing to develop and improve its curriculum. Most recently this has included developing programmes and approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy to improve attainment. This should continue to be a focus. The school takes good account of its local context when planning the curriculum. Children learn to swim from P3, they learn Gaelic from P4 and experience outdoor learning activities such as dinghy sailing and map reading. Opportunities to learn from the surrounding environment are enhanced by a range of links with local partners. For example, the school is currently working in partnership with the Scottish Association for Marine Science to develop children's understanding of the environmental impact of marine pollution. Partners also contribute very effectively to aspects of health and wellbeing such as Stramash who provide programmes in outdoor learning, the local leisure centre, the active schools service and the National Health Service. This is providing children with real and relevant learning experiences. The school should now continue to develop the curriculum to ensure there is progression, depth and challenge in children's learning across all areas of the curriculum.

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

The headteacher has had a positive impact on the work of the school since her appointment in August. She demonstrates very effective leadership and is providing clear vision and direction which staff are finding motivating. She is well respected by the whole-school community. Staff work hard together to achieve the best outcomes for children. They are keen to continue to improve their practice. All teachers and most support staff have taken on leadership roles which are leading to improvements in children's experiences. Support staff play an important role in the life of the school, having a very positive impact on the lives of children. Children are playing an increasingly active part in school improvement, for example, by developing the new school values and designing the Reading Room. The school has identified the need to develop further the role of the pupil council to give children a greater voice in improving the school. Parents are also becoming more involved in the life and work of the school. The school is now in a good position to implement more structured, systematic and rigorous procedures for evaluating all aspects of school life. This should include a focus on learning and teaching, and tracking and monitoring children's progress to ensure continued improvements in children's learning experiences and attainment. Under the leadership of the headteacher, the school is well placed to continue to improve.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Happy, confident children who are enjoying their learning and are proud of their school.
- The caring and supportive ethos built on faith values and the strong links with the local community.
- The effective leadership of the headteacher in driving school improvement.
- The high quality team work amongst all staff and their focus on improving outcomes for children.

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

- Develop teachers' confidence in assessing and tracking children's progress in order to raise attainment further.
- Continue to develop the curriculum.
- Strengthen approaches to self-evaluation across the school to ensure children's experiences and attainment continue to improve.

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 school's progress.

Mary Byrne
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/StColumbasRCPrimarySchoolArgyllandBute.asp>

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