

11 February 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

**Port Ellen Primary School and Nursery Class
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 arrangements for checking children's progress and learning through projects, for example the 'Endeavour Project'. 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?

There are notable strengths in the way that children learn and achieve. Children benefit from a climate of high expectations in which they are respected and valued. In the nursery, children's skills in solving problems are developing well. They are gaining independence by taking responsibility for the wormery. At the primary stages, for most of the time, children's learning has a clear focus on encouraging them to think and discuss in pairs and groups. They evaluate each other's learning using clear aims. Children are becoming increasingly aware of how to improve the standard of their work through the setting of targets. It would now be helpful if teachers were more consistent in their approach to giving children feedback to help them improve. By the older stages, children's skills in being independent in their learning are impressive. The 'Endeavour Project', in which children research and present an area of personal interest, is being used in an excellent way to help children develop independence. Through this project, children have developed a range of skills, culminating in presentations to parents using individual, creative and imaginative approaches. Such experiences help children to be happy, confident and successful as pupils of Port Ellen Primary School.

Children are responsible for using their 'Skills Ladder' to know how well they are developing key skills for learning, life and work. They assess their own performance in a wide range of activities in class, clubs, visits and excursions. Those who participate in the Gaelic choir have had their outstanding talents in music and song recognised at many National Mòds. The people of Islay are very proud of their achievements and offer them many high profile events at which to be ambassadors for their school.

Children's performance skills are enhanced further through their leading roles in a pantomime. Their involvement in a community musical production based on a Gaelic poem, 'Blàr' was aired on Radio nan Gàidheal. Children's skills in information communication technology are strong and include being able to make short films. The older children teach the younger ones such specialisms. Children's use of technology has been recognised with a national Scottish Education Award. Almost all children are very motivated in language and mathematics. Staff have had a detailed look at improving children's progress. Most children are making appropriate progress in language. In the nursery, children enjoy listening to stories. A story inspired their visit to the ferry, 'MV Finlaggan' to ask the captain about his work. At the primary stages, children need to be producing longer pieces of writing across all areas of their learning. In all aspects of mathematics, almost all children are making very good progress. The 'Scent Citizen' is one successful example of a meaningful context for children to use their knowledge of numeracy to make and sell products. This is also giving children a very valuable insight into running a business for which the profits are used to enhance the community. The children in the nursery visit the shop to begin to experience how money is used to buy their snack. In physical education, children are developing their skills in a variety of sports. Children's talents in shinty have led to success in a local tournament for ten successive years.

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

There are significant strengths in the way that children are supported to develop and learn. For some of the time, children in the nursery learn together with P1 and P2 which is helping to ensure progression at the early stages. Commendably, there is a very inclusive approach to children who need extra help with their learning. The specialist support teachers and assistants are very effective in helping individuals and groups. As a result, children who need support in their learning are making very good progress. All children experience a range of interesting activities. However, teachers do not always ensure that these activities are set at an appropriate level of difficulty to meet the needs of all children in each class. The very effective practice of some teachers in setting varied and challenging tasks to support learning needs to be extended across the school.

Staff have embraced Curriculum for Excellence very well. They have planned programmes for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing carefully so that a consistent approach is used across the school. For example, the strategies used for analysing reading are started at the early stages and gradually become more challenging by P7. A similar approach is used for the planning of science. This ensures children can make steady progress. In the nursery class, outdoor learning is helping to develop children's confidence. As a result of all children's efforts, the school has gained four green flags as part of the Eco-Schools Scotland award scheme. Across the school, themed projects are motivating and engaging children to link and use their learning across contexts. While having an international dimension, a notable feature of the curriculum is children's learning about their island which is deepening their understanding of their culture and language. The community's and parents' contribution to this is noteworthy. As staff continue to develop the curriculum they need to ensure more regular learning of Gaelic.

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

The headteacher's skilful leadership is leading to continuous improvement at Port Ellen Primary School. She has a thorough understanding of what works well, where improvements are needed and the steps to be taken. The headteacher is also recognised for her valuable contribution to Gaelic music and song. She regularly visits the playroom and classrooms to give well-judged advice. Arrangements for checking children's progress and achievement need to be continued and extended across all curriculum areas. This will ensure that all children are making appropriate progress across all areas of their learning. Staff have been proactive in working together to take forward developments. Their work on the 'Endeavour' and 'Land of Me' projects have featured in Scottish and British publications. Clearly Port Ellen is a school which promotes ambition as part of the school's vision for high expectations. Under the leadership of the headteacher, we are confident that the school has the capacity to improve further.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- The leadership and vision of the headteacher in achieving well-paced change and improvement.
- Confident and articulate children who play an important role in the life of the school and its community.
- Extensive range of learning experiences which enables children to be ambitious and successful.
- The focus on the island's language and culture to develop children's appreciation of their Scottish identity.
- The impact of staff working together to develop a high-quality curriculum.

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

- In partnership with children, parents and community partners, the school should continue to implement the priorities set out within the school's well-judged annual improvement plan, particularly to ensure consistently high-quality learning experiences for all children.

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 evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified aspects of innovative practice in the use of projects which we would like to explore further. We will work with the school and Argyll and Bute Council in order to record the innovative practice and share it more widely.

Joan C. Esson
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/PortEllenPrimarySchoolArgyllandBute.asp> .

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