

29 April 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

**St Joseph's Primary School
Inverclyde 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 interdisciplinary learning, partnerships and citizenship. 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 enjoy learning and are very proud of their school. They benefit from the strong Catholic values which underpin the school's work. They respond positively to the various active approaches to learning in classes and across the life of the school. They work very effectively, both individually and cooperatively in pairs and teams. Almost all children demonstrate a responsible and independent attitude to learning. Children value greatly the wide range of interesting learning experiences at school. They talk confidently and enthusiastically about their learning. Older children are able to explain what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers have recently introduced 'learning journeys' which are supporting children to reflect on and take more responsibility for their learning. Children are developing a strong understanding of global citizenship and support international charities very well. Commendably, working in close partnership with the local parish community, children have raised a significant amount of money to fund the cost of building a kitchen for a school in Malawi. Children talk very proudly about this achievement. Children readily take on a range of leadership roles, such as in the school council, the health committee, as 'reading buddies' to younger children and as Junior Road Safety Officers. As a result, children are developing very important skills for life, learning and work.

Children are making very good progress across their learning. From the early stages, children have opportunities to work together in cooperative groups and, as a result, they listen well and talk confidently to each other. Across the school, children are making very good progress in their reading. By the upper stages, most are able to analyse texts well. Children enjoy reading. The majority of children can talk about their favourite authors. The school has recently taken positive and successful steps to support and motivate those children who are not making enough progress with

reading. The whole-school approach to improving writing is having a positive impact on children's writing skills. Children write very well for a range of relevant, current and motivating purposes, frequently linked effectively to topic work or to the life and work of the school. At P7, children work in pairs to write play-scripts about complex social issues such as tackling sectarianism and racism. In mathematics, most children across the school are confident in their mental and written calculations. In the best examples, children apply their skills in real-life contexts, for example, organising the weekly 'toast club' and regular Fairtrade Café. Children would benefit from more opportunities to use information and communication technology to extend their understanding of displaying information in graphs and charts. The school promotes children's health and wellbeing very well through a range of programmes and interesting activities. For example, as part of the school's plans to celebrate the 2014 Commonwealth Games, all children are participating in their own 'baton relay race' by running a mile each week and charting their progress on a map. Older children show a keen interest in ballroom dancing and their local history by their enthusiastic participation in the local community arts projects, 'Are ye dancing?' and 'Are ye asking?'.

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

Staff have created a very supportive and caring ethos across the school. They give high priority to meeting children's personal and learning needs. They provide sensitive support to those children who may require it. Overall, most lessons are set at the right level of challenge for children. However, in a few classes, children would benefit from a brisker pace of learning. We have asked the school to review the size of groups in some of the classes in order to ensure the needs of all children are fully met. Support staff provide children with helpful assistance in classes to learn alongside their classmates. The school works well with a broad range of professionals to help children who may require additional support with their learning. Across the school, children benefit from a well-planned and motivating curriculum. Staff are working well together to develop programmes and topics in line with Curriculum for Excellence. In the last three years, staff have reviewed and made significant improvements to their approaches to learning and teaching, and give children stimulating experiences through relevant, real-life contexts for learning. Children's ideas and interests help inform their learning. For example, at P2, children's keen interest in 'superheroes' is providing a stimulating context for them to develop their writing skills. Staff work hard to make relevant links across different areas of the curriculum. The school has fostered positive relationships with a range of partners to enhance children's learning including health professionals and a local community arts group. Staff recognise that they now need to develop approaches to outdoor learning. There are very good arrangements in place to ensure a smooth transition is made for children moving from P7 to St Columba's High School. Commendably, P1 teachers are very proactive in seeking information about pre-school children's achievements and progress in learning so that they can build on children's learning as soon as they begin P1.

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

The school has a clear plan in place which is helping to bring about improvements in its work. The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school and this is having a significant and positive impact. He has high expectations of children and staff. His

well-judged focus on improving approaches to learning and teaching has greatly improved children's experiences. His inclusive and enthusiastic approach has secured strong support from parents and the wider community. Staff are developing positive approaches to involving parents more fully in their children's learning. Recently, a group of parents joined their children in class to make models as part of their learning about the Vikings and castles. There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school and this has supported staff to respond positively to the brisk pace of change. Most staff take on opportunities for leadership roles and their skills and enthusiasm are used to very good effect to secure school improvements. Opportunities for staff to work with colleagues in local schools are helping to improve their approaches to assessing children's progress. The school has identified the need to continue to improve its arrangements for tracking and monitoring children's progress to ensure they all achieve as highly as possible, and has made plans to address this aspect of its work. The newly-appointed acting deputy headteacher provides very good support to the staff and headteacher. The school also values and benefits from the helpful support it receives from Inverclyde Council.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- The leadership of the headteacher in securing significant improvements in the school.
- Responsible and motivated children who are proud of their school and are making very good progress in their learning.
- The strong teamwork and commitment of staff to providing a safe and stimulating place for children to learn.
- Strong partnerships with the local and wider community.

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

- Continue to develop approaches to tracking children's progress to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all.
- Continue to develop the curriculum in line with national guidance.

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, Inverclyde Council will inform parents about the school's progress.

Jackie Maley
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/StJosephsPrimarySchoolInverclyde.asp>

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