

8 February 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education are currently carrying out visits to some schools and early learning and childcare settings across Scotland. When we wrote to you after the last inspection of Millbank Primary School, we said that we would engage with the school to report on progress. We recently engaged in discussion with staff and the local authority and carried out a visit to Millbank Primary School. Our engagement helped us learn more about how children and their families have been supported through the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard about approaches that have been working well to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress. We discussed with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and local authority officer the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from our original inspection.

This letter sets out what we found during our visit.

Supporting children, young people and families through COVID-19

During the initial period of school building closures, staff set up virtual classrooms on a digital platform to support remote learning. Children were also given paper learning packs and helpful resources to support learning at home. Teachers produced weekly learning grids which offered flexibility to working parents and families with children at multiple stages across the school. Staff worked well together as a team. Teachers offered daily check-ins with children and families. Senior leaders monitored learner engagement, making contact with families to offer support as required. Staff prioritised wellbeing for all, with support staff undertaking wellbeing walks with a few children identified as requiring additional support. Senior leaders worked closely with partners to signpost valuable support to families. The senior leadership team have developed open, positive and trusting relationships with all staff and with partners who work regularly in the school. Partnership working supports well the school's approach to recovery.

Senior leaders set out key priorities in the school improvement plan reflecting recovery and ongoing progress against the areas for improvement from the original inspection. There is a very clear focus on nurture, wellbeing and raising attainment. Teachers use a range of assessments to identify gaps in children's learning. Support staff work well with children who benefit from help to address gaps in literacy and numeracy. Staff use a range of strategies and targeted resources to support children to make progress. Children complete termly wellbeing assessments which help staff to identify individuals who may require support. Nurture is a key feature of the school's approach to recovery. The 'Bridge Room', provides a nurturing space which children can access for additional support or reflection. Staff work collaboratively to ensure nurture principles and strategies are evident in classrooms across the school. Staff implement a whole-school approach to improve children's social skills, build confidence, promote resilience and develop a greater sense of their own wellbeing.

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 places significant pressure on senior leaders and staff. A greater number of children require social and emotional support, particularly at the early

stages. Senior leaders face ongoing challenges to the day-to-day running of the school as a result of staff and children's COVID-19 related absence.

Progress with recommendations from previous inspection

Senior leaders have a clear vision which maintains a focus on continuous improvement across the school and the Bothy, despite the challenges of the pandemic. They empower staff to lead. Staff have a collective responsibility for implementing positive change. There are effective processes in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of the work across the school. Led by senior leaders, staff now need to measure the impact of change on improving outcomes for children.

Senior leaders support and encourage staff to undertake relevant professional learning to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Children respond well to the range of learning experiences on offer. There are increasing opportunities for children to lead their learning as they begin to develop an understanding of their strengths and identify their next steps. Staff should continue to work together to share effective practice across the school. In the Bothy, teachers and pupil support assistants share a clear understanding of the social, emotional, mental and physical needs of children. They work together successfully to provide learning activities which are well-planned, structured and relevant to children's interests and needs. Children are now motivated and participate well in a wider range of stimulating tasks and activities. Staff should continue to ensure they build on what children already know and maintain high expectations for all learners.

Staff across the school work collaboratively to plan learning and discuss assessment, progress and the standard of learners' work. As a result, teachers' professional judgement of children's progress and attainment is increasingly reliable. Senior leaders track and monitor children's progress effectively across the school. Data provided by the school demonstrates improved levels of attainment across all stages in literacy and numeracy over the past 12 months. There is still a need to raise attainment further at all stages. More time is needed, as a result of the pandemic, to realise fully the impact of improved approaches to learning and teaching on outcomes for children. Staff in the Bothy have introduced and embedded a range of systems and approaches to enhance learning experiences, meet learners' individual needs and promote positive relationships. Children follow personalised learning programmes which take account of what they know and of each child's needs and interests. Teachers are beginning to track and monitor children's progress in a more structured and systematic way. Across the school and the Bothy, senior leaders and staff now need to ensure that targeted interventions are having a positive impact on children's attainment and achievement.

Senior leaders ensure inclusion is a stronger feature of the school. Children now recognise and can talk about their emotions, and use the wellbeing indicators to identify their own wellbeing needs. Staff work well with a range of partners to support an inclusive approach to meeting children's needs. All children in the Bothy access mainstream classes for a short time as part of their personalised educational plan. Teachers in the Bothy collaborate more effectively with each child's mainstream class teacher to plan learning, measure children's progress and identify next steps. They monitor each child's health and wellbeing closely and respond effectively to any heightened anxiety or distress. Most children in the Bothy enjoy accessing these wider learning experiences and socialising with their class groups. They would benefit from more time in their mainstream classes and mixing with a larger peer

group. They would also benefit from being more involved in the life of the school, working with other learners' and taking on leadership roles as appropriate.

Senior leaders and staff should continue to review the curriculum to ensure it offers all children relevant, meaningful contexts for learning. As part of the school's plan for recovery, there is an increased focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and staff should ensure that children continue to experience a broad and balanced curriculum, in line with their entitlements. This curriculum should include planned, progressive learning activities in areas such as science, languages and technology.

What happens next?

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these have had a significant impact on the work of the school, there have been notable improvements under the direction of the current leadership team. Senior leaders and staff are implementing well-considered plans to support recovery. They have also increased the pace of change in taking forward areas for improvement from the original inspection. We recognise that as a result of the pandemic, the school needs more time to realise fully the impact of recently implemented strategies on children's achievement and attainment. We have asked Moray Council to provide us with further information about the school's progress in continuing to raise attainment for all children within one year of the publication of this letter. We will work together with local authority officers to agree what will happen next. Should we require another visit to the school, we will inform parents/carers. Otherwise, Moray Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality its education service.

Susie Smith
HM Inspector