

3 February 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

**Plockton High School incorporating Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd (National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music) and the school residence
The Highland Council**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and young people and worked closely with the headteacher, residence manager and staff. We wanted to find out how well young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports young people 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 work, including Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd and the opportunities for those who need additional support in their learning. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving young people's education.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Most young people have positive experiences when learning and achieving. Young people who are in the school residence enjoy a homely environment and a strong sense of belonging. In the school, young people are respectful and polite and want to be successful. In almost all classes, relationships with staff are positive. Young people enjoy learning. They focus well when activities are varied and well-paced with opportunities to work in pairs and groups. Such experiences are not yet frequent enough across the school. Staff have started to discuss with young people how to improve their work. A more detailed approach across learning, including better use of 'Personal Support Time', would help young people know how to improve further. Young people's learning is enriched through a range of experiences to achieve beyond the classroom. Their involvement in projects such as Computers for Africa helps foster an empathy to others. Young people develop an appreciation of other cultures through a range of excursions which include to Rome, Paris and Poland. The quality of young people's learning in Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd is very high. Young people share their outstanding skills in music and song by performing at prestigious events and major festivals such as Celtic Connections. About half of the young people in the school feel their views are valued and taken into account. We have asked the school to give young people a greater say in decision-making, including by increasing their role in the Youth Board.

Young people's achievements are recognised through school awards and a few national awards. A few young people volunteer in the community which contributes to them receiving a Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Local businesses help prepare young

people for the world of work by focusing on interview skills. Those in the school residence engage in a range of valuable activities. As a next step, we have asked all staff to raise an awareness of the key skills for learning, life and work that are developed by participating in all such activities. Young people who need additional support in their learning are making good progress. Many of the young people in Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd achieve high standards in National Qualifications for music and in competitions such as Scottish Piping Championships. In Gaelic Medium Education, the few who do National Qualifications achieve very well. However, those in S1-S3 would benefit from improving their fluency. From S1-S3, the school does not yet have a clear picture of how well young people are progressing and achieving in all curricular areas. We have asked the school to have a strategic overview of young people's progress which is based on rigorous assessment and checking of their progress. In S4, the school is improving young people's attainment in National 5 or equivalent. By S6, attainment in Higher and Advanced Higher is significantly better than schools with young people with similar needs and backgrounds. As young people leave school, the school is improving their achievements in literacy and numeracy. Almost all young people are successful in moving on to positive destinations on leaving school. Some of those in Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd move onto national and international success.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Overall, the school supports young people well to develop and learn. In Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd, young people are challenged very effectively in their learning of music. In lessons in the school, most teachers are improving the range of tasks and activities that they deliver. As a result, for most of the time, these are appropriate in meeting the needs of learners. In the majority of lessons, there is a brisk pace with a level of challenge which ensures that all young people are making the best progress. However, this is not yet consistent across the school with scope for young people to lead and take more responsibility for their learning. Support for learning staff effectively provide opportunities for those who need help with their learning. These have a well-judged emphasis on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Partners such as the residence manager, Skye and Lochalsh Young Carers and the children's services worker complement well the work of staff in meeting specialised needs. Commendably, young people with additional support needs talk regularly with staff about the progress that they are making towards their individualised plans. Support for learning staff should continue to share their expertise with teachers to ensure that a full range of learners' needs are met in an inclusive and nurturing environment.

Overall, staff have embraced many aspects of Curriculum for Excellence. However, they now need to increase the pace of implementing some important key areas of national guidance. In S1-S3, young people are offered a range of courses with some opportunities for deeper learning in S3 in which young people begin to specialise in some subjects. Their interests are also broadened through a range of short courses such as Enterprise and Sports Leaders. Across subjects, staff should review the purpose of projects to ensure that they are helping young people to engage in meaningful experiences which help them make connections in their learning. Teachers are not yet planning clearly enough how they are developing and assessing literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across learning. In S4-S6, young people

benefit from a wide range of courses which lead to National Qualifications. Links to the University of the Highlands and Islands help young people gain relevant skills for work in a profession or industry that they may wish to pursue on leaving school. For those in Gaelic Medium Education, this can lead to an award in media studies. Young people have opportunities to enhance their skills in Gaelic by taking part in national events such as FilmG and debating. Working with the local authority, the school needs to continue to increase the numbers studying Gaelic (Learners) and Gàidhlig to National Qualifications. The opportunities for music for those in Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd are innovative and tailored to the needs of each individual learner.

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

As a newly formed team, the headteacher and depute headteacher have focused successfully on developing a better understanding with staff of their role in improving the school. In subject teams and as individuals, teachers are now taking more ownership of self-evaluation activities. They are applying national standards to identify ways in which they can enhance learning and achievement. Senior managers are developing a programme of activities to give staff feedback on their work. This includes observing learning and teaching and reviewing performance in National Qualifications. However, the school's approaches to planning for improvement are not yet rigorous and used consistently enough to fully impact on key areas of the school. A clear priority is to increase the effectiveness of tracking young people's progress, particularly from S1 to S3. The well-respected residence manager leads the staff in the school residence very well in identifying and taking forward objectives for improvement.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Young people who are respectful, polite and focus well on their learning.
- Young people's attainment by S6.
- The outstanding achievements of the young people in Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd.
- The care and support to those who reside in the school residence.

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

- Increase the pace of developing key aspects of Curriculum for Excellence, including to better meet the learning needs of all young people.
- Continue to develop Gaelic Learner and Medium Education to improve fluency and increase the numbers achieving National Qualifications.
- Improve approaches to tracking and monitoring young people's progress, particularly from S1 to S3.
- Continue to develop approaches to self-evaluation as a responsibility of all staff to ensure well-paced change and high-quality learning experiences.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that most of the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. Our Area Lead Officer will work with The Highland Council to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. Parents will be informed of the extent to which the school has improved.

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/PlocktonHighSchoolHighland.asp>

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