

**REPORT TO:** Education Committee

**MEETING DATE:** 22 March 2022

**BY:** Executive Director for Education and Children's Services

**SUBJECT:** Visit of Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class by Education Scotland

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To report to Committee on the recent visit of Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class by Education Scotland to learn more about the support for children and their families through the COVID-19 pandemic, approaches to support children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress, and the school's progress in taking forward the recommendations from the inspection which took place in June 2019.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to: -
- (i) Note the content of the Education Scotland's letter to parents dated 11 January 2022 (Appendix 1).
  - (ii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the support provided to children and families through the COVID-19 pandemic and the approaches to supporting children's health and wellbeing, learning and progress.
  - (iii) Congratulate the Head Teacher and staff on the progress that has been made since the inspection visit by Education Scotland in June 2019.
  - (iv) Note that the staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, Education Scotland will make no further visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. East Lothian Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

3.1 Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class was inspected in June 2019. The inspection team agreed that the school required more time and support to make the necessary identified improvements and a further inspection would be carried out within one year of the publication of the letter to parents/carers.

3.2 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, inspections of schools by Education Scotland were paused in March 2020. In September 2021, Education Scotland announced a phased return to scrutiny activities engaging with those schools due to have a further inspection. The focus of the visits was the impact of the pandemic and the actions taken to support recovery, and the progress around the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report from the initial inspection in June 2019.

3.3 The visit by Education Scotland to Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class took place on 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and included discussions with the Head Teacher and staff, visits to classes and engagement with focus groups of pupils and parents/carers. A letter of the findings was published to parents/carers on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

#### **3.4 Supporting children, young people and their families through COVID-19**

In the letter to parents/carers, the inspectors recognised that the Head Teacher and staff were continuing to respond to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as absences and periods of remote learning, and that good progress had been made in taking forward improvements from the original inspection.

Inspectors also recognised the improvements made by staff in the provision of remote learning, evident in the quality and variety of lessons on offer for children. This helped to increase children's engagement and motivation during these periods. Inspectors also noted that parents valued the quality of communication received from the school and appreciated the school's flexibility in responding to different needs families.

The inspection team recognised improvement in the school's approach to meeting the needs of children, with more targeted action being taken where required and the innovative ways in which teachers ensured children received the support that they needed. Staff provided regular experiences to help children reconnect and have fun with their peers. Children and families reported that these activities helped them to feel happy and included in school.

#### **3.5 Progress made against recommendations from previous inspection**

The inspection team noted that the Head Teacher's strong leadership provided direction and a clear focus on learning and teaching for the school and nursery. She established trusting positive relationships across the school community and staff felt empowered in their new roles as leaders of learning.

3.6 The letter to parent/carers noted a number of areas of improvement since the previous inspection, including:

- All staff felt well-supported by the Head Teacher to implement a structured approach to nurturing children's emotional needs. Pupils now talked confidently about how they felt and are able to use strategies to support themselves and others when they are facing challenges.
- Staff have made good progress in improving approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers now plan progressive lessons that take better account of children's needs and build on their prior knowledge.
- Across the school, well-structured team-teaching approaches effectively support raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. As a result, more children are working at nationally expected levels and are making better progress from prior levels in their learning.
- Children are now clear about the purpose of their lessons and what they need to do to succeed. They can talk about their achievements and successes and are demonstrating more leadership of their own learning.

3.7 The inspection team noted the impact of the pandemic on the overall pace of improvement and, as a result, the pace of change in a few areas of improvement has been affected. Despite this, staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully and the school has made good progress in taking forward improvements. As a result the inspectors will not make further visits to the school in connection with the original inspection.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None

#### **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Financial - None

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other - None

## 7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Education Scotland letter to parents of Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class dated 11 January 2022 (Appendix 1 - Visit - East Lothian Council - Whitecraig Primary School - 5550726 - Publication - Final letter for publication.pdf).

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<b>DATE</b>	7 February 2021

11 January 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 Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class, 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 Whitecraig Primary School and Nursery Class. 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 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**

The headteacher and staff continue to respond to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as absences and periods of remote learning. As a result, the pace of change in a few areas of improvement have been affected. Despite this, the school has made good progress in taking forward improvements from the original inspection.

Staff worked well to build on lessons learned from the first period of remote learning and, as a result, increased further the quality and variety of lessons on offer for children. They also reviewed approaches to better balance activities completed online and away from the screen. This helped to increase children's engagement and motivation.

Parents value the communication received from the school and report that they feel staff go 'the extra mile' in supporting children, families and the community during challenging times. They value the school's flexibility in responding to different family needs.

The headteacher and staff use information effectively to evaluate children's progress in literacy and numeracy and identify gaps in learning. Teachers and support staff are implementing well-planned interventions and are supporting children's individual needs well.

Staff take a whole school approach to support wellbeing during periods of remote learning, with more targeted action being taken where required. Teachers create innovative ways to ensure children receive the support that they need, for example, the online Lego club. The school reports that COVID-19 restrictions have had an adverse impact on children's resilience and wellbeing. This is an area of significant focus since the return to the school building. Staff are providing regular experiences to help children reconnect and have fun with their peers. Children and families report that these activities help them to feel happy and included in school.

## **Progress with recommendations from previous inspection**

The headteacher's strong leadership provides direction and a clear focus on learning and teaching for the school and nursery. She has established trusting positive relationships across the school community. Staff are empowered in their new roles as leaders of learning.

All staff are well-supported by the headteacher to implement a structured approach to nurturing children's emotional needs. Children now show higher levels of respect for each other and the adults they work alongside. They can talk confidently about how they feel and increasingly use strategies to support themselves and others when they are facing challenges. The headteacher and staff continue to embed developments to improve the ethos within the school.

Staff have made good progress in improving approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers now plan lessons that take better account of children's needs and build on prior knowledge. High expectations of children's work and behaviour are consistently upheld across the school and nursery. Assessment information is more accurate and links very well into the school's planning cycle.

Across the school, well-structured team-teaching approaches effectively support raising attainment in literacy and numeracy. As a result, more children are working at nationally expected levels and are making progress from prior levels in their learning. As planned, staff should continue to develop planned learning, teaching and assessment to reflect the full breadth of the curriculum in relevant and meaningful contexts.

Children are clearer about the purpose of their lessons and what they need to do to succeed. They can talk about their achievements and successes. Across school and nursery, children are able to identify what they would like to learn next. With support from adults, they are demonstrating more leadership of their own learning. Staff should continue to develop children's knowledge of themselves as learners and their skills of working independently.

## **What happens next?**

Understandably, the school has been responding to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These have had a significant impact on the work of the school. Staff are implementing plans to support recovery. Staff have addressed the recommendations from the original inspection successfully. As a result, we will make no more visits to the school in connection with the original inspection. East Lothian Council will continue to inform parents about the school's progress as part of its usual arrangements for reporting on the quality of its education service.

Lisa Marie McDonnell  
HM Inspector