

Education Scotland

Unit 7

Blair Court

Clydebank Business Park

Clydebank

G81 2LA

T 0141 435 3550

F 0141 435 3555

E Clydebank@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk

Textphone 01506 600236

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Dear Parent/Carer

Merkland School

East Dunbartonshire Council

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents, children and young people and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children and young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children and 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 recent work, including the work of the Language and Communication Resource (LCR) and transitions into and out of the school. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children and young people's education.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Children and young people learn and achieve very well in Merkland School. Almost all are engaged and motivated in their learning. They feel safe and cared for in school and feel that they are treated fairly and with respect by staff. When given the opportunity, children and young people take responsibility for their learning. Some young people at the senior phase support younger children in their learning and this could be further extended. Children and young people are developing their literacy skills very well. In primary classes they are developing their writing skills by constructing and

discussing randomly generated sentences. In secondary classes, they are reading novels and adapted Shakespeare plays, and they are developing writing in a variety of styles including drama and haiku poetry. In the LCR, young people are developing skills of turn-taking, following instructions and responding to questions. Children and young people are also making very good progress in developing numeracy skills, including the use of money and telling the time. This should be extended to allow them to develop numeracy skills related to shape, position and movement. Children and young people are also making very good progress in health and wellbeing, learning to make appropriate choices, adopting a healthy lifestyle and managing their relationships with others.

Young people attain very well in SQA qualifications from Access 2 to Intermediate 2 levels. Young people also attain Access 2 qualifications through skills for work courses at college. Children and young people are achieving very well in a range of activities including the Drake Music project and the Prince's Trust xl programme. Learners can demonstrate their information and communications technology skills very effectively, for example through video clips or by creating animations.

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In the senior phase, young people developed enterprise skills through their 'Skinny Santas' company. They made and successfully marketed jewellery, raising money for Ugandan schools as well as subsidising attendance at the Special Olympics. Children and young people are developing their skills and confidence very well through the successful choir, which recently performed in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Several young people achieved significant sporting success at the Special Olympic National Games in August 2013, with young people winning 15 medals, including five gold medals. Involvement in the East Dunbartonshire 'positive achievements' programme is helping young people to develop skills for work and to prepare for life beyond school. Over the last three years, every young person who has left school has moved on to a college placement. The school plans to improve its arrangements for tracking and monitoring the achievements and attainment of children and young people.

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

The school supports children and young people to develop and learn very well. Almost all teachers plan tasks and activities well to meet children's and young people's needs. Teachers are skilled at adapting their approaches in response to children's and young people's responses and interests. They work well with support staff who support children and young people very effectively to make progress in their learning. Teachers use interactive technology to motivate children and young people in their lessons. The school works closely with partner agencies to identify and meet the needs of children and young people. This work is coordinated through the pupil support group. The LCR is an authority provision for young people with language and communication difficulties, providing them with intensive support. Young people are supported sensitively to develop their social and emotional wellbeing and to make progress in their learning. The pupil support base provides a safe and welcoming environment for any child or young person who requires some time away from class. Staff have a shared understanding of the school's curriculum and what it is for, although there is not a clear rationale which has been shared with children and young people, parents and carers and partner agencies. There now needs to be an agreed approach to curriculum planning as this varies across the school. Staff have introduced a system where teachers outline helpfully the progression of skills for each learner. They should review this approach to ensure that it is used consistently across the school. Staff have developed some good opportunities for skills development through interdisciplinary learning, with opportunities for children and young people to use their learning across subject areas. A few young people have access to subject classes in local secondary schools. Staff should try to build on these partnerships to create greater choice in the

senior phase. The school works with colleges to offer a range of courses which help young people to achieve better outcomes and transition beyond school.

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

The school is led by a headteacher and her team of depute headteachers and principal teachers who are dedicated to achieving the best outcomes for all learners. Their work to inspire and support children and young people and their families, is greatly appreciated by parents and carers and partner agencies. The most recent

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school improvement plan has resulted in several measurable improvements for children's and young people's learning. However, the school needs to improve its systems to review its work and to plan for improvement. Senior managers evaluate classroom practice but this now needs to be done more frequently. The pupil council has had some impact on the work of the school but there could be more leadership opportunities for children and young people. There is great potential to involve them more closely in decision-making. The headteacher has identified the issues which need to be tackled and now needs to work more closely with staff, children and young people, parents and partners to bring about further improvement.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Staff's sensitivity to the needs of children and young people.
- Very positive and respectful relationships between staff and children and young people.
- Polite, well-motivated and enthusiastic children and young people.
- The leadership of the headteacher and the wider management team.
- Successful preparation of young people for life after school.

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

- Implement effective systems for monitoring and tracking children's and young people's progress in learning.
- Continue to develop the curriculum including progression in children and young people's learning from primary through to the senior phase.
- Improve outcomes for children and young people more effectively through self-evaluation.

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, the education authority will inform parents about the school's progress.

Ken McAra

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/MerklandSchoolEastDunbartonshire.asp>

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