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First class day as surprise guests go back to school

Members of the emergency services went back to school for a day in Fort William at the end of last month, writes Mark Entwistle.

Youngsters from Caol Primary School welcomed officers from Police Scotland, as well as members of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Ambulance Service for a day of learning and interaction.

Police Constable Shaun Knox said: 'What a fantastic day we had, I'm not sure I remember my school days being so good. The kids' enthusiasm and interest in what we do was incredibly humbling and I think I speak for all the emergency services there that day that this was

an incredibly enjoyable day. I hope the children enjoyed it as much as we did and we look forward to more events the future.'

Deputy head teacher Kerry Lamont added: 'The children of Caol nursery were delighted to meet some special surprise visitors during their annual Fun Fortnight recently.

'They loved meeting the emergency services team, exploring their vehicles and asking lots of questions about their different jobs.'

'As a school, we look forward to working closely with our local liaison officer in the future to arrange further visits and to ensure our pupils know what to do and who to contact in an emergency.'

Members of the various emergency services received a warm welcome at Caol Primary School.



Caol pupils enjoy upbeat mental health support

by Mark Entwistle
mentwistle@lochabertimes.co.uk

A Lochaber primary school has partnered with a music charity to help address the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children.

Caol Primary School has 240 pupils and offers education from nursery age through to P7. As there are no specialist facilities or schools in the area for primary age pupils, Caol School provides education for a wide variety of children's needs, including those with severe and complex needs.

With education having returned to a degree of normality following the lockdowns of the previous two years, the Fort William area school is keen to provide support to pupils whose mental health may have been impacted by the pandem-



Music therapist Clare Reynolds with some of the Caol school pupils enjoying a session, left; and below, the music sessions have proved popular with the Caol Primary pupils. Photograph: Music Therapy International.



Primary School was a pleasure from start to finish. It's been inspiring to see staff so motivated to use music to help the children who attend the school.'

Alexia Quin, director of Music as Therapy International, said the Covid pandemic has had an immeasurable impact on everyone, especially children for whom school was so disrupted.

'We believe strongly in the power of music to help people overcome any number of challenges, so it's heartening to work with people like the staff at Caol Primary School, who are so committed to supporting their pupils,' she added.

ic. To do this, it has partnered with an award-winning charity to embed the therapeutic benefits of music in its daily routine.

Music as Therapy International is a London-based charity with more than 25 years' experience of delivering music projects in care and education settings.

The charity trains teachers and caregivers to use simple music therapy techniques and musical activities to support children's development and wellbeing.

The charity has now completed its training project, which saw a local professional music therapist, Clare Reynolds, spend time with staff to demonstrate and share the

benefits music could have for children at the school.

Although initially led by Ms Reynolds, over the course of the project, Caol Primary School's staff gradually took on leadership of the music sessions, so they are now able to run their own music programme independently.

Sharon MacDonald, head teacher of Caol Primary School, said: 'This partnership between Caol Primary School and Music as Therapy International demonstrates our ongoing commitment to providing the best possible education and support to all of our pupils.'

Ms Reynolds added: 'Working with the staff at Caol

New bridge to Skye's Fairy Pools

Visitors to one of Skye's most iconic sites, the Fairy Pools, can now enjoy a safer walk across burns with the latest installation of two new bridges.

The newly installed bridges have been made with steel, and are timber clad, to help improve accessibility and safety measures for those visiting the popular tourist destination, come rain or shine, and without the risk of falling in on the previously used open crossings.

The popular tourist spot will also benefit from an extensive footpath upgrade which is due to be completed in March 2023. The completed bridges form part of the ongoing work carried out by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland on the Skye Iconic Sites Project (SISP).

The three-stage project will see the restoration and development of Skye's most iconic sites including the Fairy



Pools, Old Man of Storr and Quiraing.

Dougie Baird, CEO of Outdoor Access Trust Scotland, said: 'We've been hard at work installing two bridges that not only make the site more accessible but complement the dramatic landscape at the Fairy Pools.'

'Before the installation of the timber bridges, access across the burns was difficult in wet and high water conditions, causing habitat damage along the bank sides where visitors looked for a place to cross.'

'Now the bridges are complete, visitors can enjoy safe

crossings whilst the habitat can have a chance to recover. We are looking forward to the next stage of upgrading the pathworks nearby, which will further enhance this beautiful site.'

Last month saw the official opening of the Quiraing footpaths with cabinet secretary for finance and the economy - as well as being the local constituency MSP - Kate Forbes present.

SISP is part of an almost £9 million Scottish programme of projects to invest in the Highlands and Islands to provide more and better-quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy natural and cultural heritage assets.

The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund is led by NatureScot and is part funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

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