

Summarised inspection findings

Kirkcowan School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

24 January 2023

Key contextual information

Kirkcowan School and Nursery Class is situated in the small, rural village of Kirkcowan, approximately seven miles southwest of Newton Stewart. Almost all of the children reside within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 5. At the time of the inspection, the primary school roll was 47, split across two mixed-age classes. Six children were registered for the nursery class.

Kirkcowan School and Nursery Class has a shared headship and is partnered with another local primary school. The headteacher has been in post for seven years and is supported by a principal teacher and nursery manager.

During the pandemic, staff responded to the identified needs of families by supplying practical resource packs to support remote learning. Long-term staff absence over the last session has impacted on the work of the school and nursery class.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff have created a very calm, caring and nurturing ethos at Kirkcowan School. Children and staff are very proud of their school. Staff have very positive relationships with each other and with parents and children. Children are polite and respectful to each other and to adults and visitors to the school. They support each other well within the mixed age classes.
- All children behave well and are motivated to learn. They are attentive in class and engage enthusiastically in a range of learning activities. Children appreciate the emotional check-ins at the beginning of the day and feel they are well supported.
- In most lessons, teachers make effective use of digital technologies, such as laptops and interactive whiteboards, to enrich children's learning. Older children complete simple coding activities and support other children well in developing their digital skills. Teachers make effective use of online resources to consolidate recent learning and assess children's progress.
- Staff have made an initial start to incorporating play at early and first level. Children have opportunities to engage in free play that reflects a specific topic or their own interests. Staff should now work with the nursery practitioners to enhance play further across the early level and beyond. In doing this, they should explore together the main messages from the national practice guidance, *Realising the Ambition: Being Me*.
- In all classes, staff give children the opportunity to have personalisation and choice. Teachers determine what children already know and would like to learn at the outset of new topics. This gives them the opportunity to direct the learning by developing big questions they would like answered.

- Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers provide clear instructions and helpful explanations. In most lessons, they effectively support and challenge children in their learning. Teachers use questioning well to check children's understanding and extend their thinking. They ensure a good balance between direct teaching, collaborative activities and independent learning. This enables teachers to allocate time to teach groups of children within the mixed age classes. Teachers share effectively the purpose and the outcomes of lessons with children. They should now support children to identify what success looks like. This will help children to take more responsibility for improving their work.
- Teachers plan effectively for learning using the experiences and outcomes for all areas of the curriculum. They supplement termly planners with more in-depth weekly planning of learning and teaching. They plan well for groups of children, charting their progress through the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. Teachers should now incorporate the planning of assessment, based on National Benchmarks, into their planning process. This will support them to evidence children's progress in curriculum areas outwith literacy and numeracy. Children lack confidence when revisiting prior learning in numeracy and mathematics. Teachers should now plan more opportunities for children to consolidate and reinforce their skills and knowledge in numeracy and mathematics on a regular basis.
- Support for learning teachers, support staff and class teachers plan well together to meet the needs of children with barriers to learning. Teachers differentiate learning well in lessons within the mixed stage classes. Pupil support assistants work very effectively in the class or in separate group situations with children who need extra assistance. A few children benefit from well-judged social and emotional support.
- Teachers use a range of helpful summative, standardised and diagnostic assessments of children's work in literacy and numeracy. This helps them to measure attainment and identify next steps in learning effectively. Most teachers provide regular feedback to children on their writing to help them improve. They should build on this practice in other curriculum areas. Teachers provide children with targets for literacy and numeracy in child friendly language. This supports children to understand how to improve their learning. Teachers should continue to support children to become independent and informed when identifying their strengths and areas for development. Teachers and children informally assess wellbeing needs through daily check-ins. Teachers should now develop approaches to assessing wellbeing needs using the wellbeing indicators.
- Prior to the pandemic, teachers had taken part in collaborative moderation activities with their partner school and local cluster schools. This supported them in developing a shared understanding of the standard expected. Teachers plan to resume this work on moderation, within Kirkcowan and with other schools. This will help to build their confidence in making decisions on achievement of a level.
- The headteacher and teachers have a robust understanding of every individual child's attainment. They meet on a termly basis to discuss assessment data and track children's progress. Teachers ensure that effective interventions are put in place to support learning needs. As a result, most children are making good progress, and a few are making very good progress.
- Teachers are committed to developing and improving learning and teaching. They have worked well with each other and with staff from their partner school and local cluster schools to improve approaches to the teaching of reading and writing. Teachers provide children with regular lessons on how to structure their writing. Teachers complement this with reading lessons that model the structure of writing that children are focusing on. As a result, children are motivated and enthusiastic about writing. However, at times children find the new

associated technical language confusing and this impacts on the quality of their work. Staff teach reading skills well. Children have opportunities to work together in groups to develop reading skills with others using novels. Across the school, children report that they love reading. They use the school library well but have not used the public library which is in the neighbouring town.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- In June 2022, the majority of children achieved expected CfE levels in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Most children across the school are on track to achieve expected levels by the end of this session. Children with additional support needs are making good progress towards achieving their targets. A few children are working beyond expected levels. As this is a small school with two mixed-age classes, general statements about progress have been made to ensure children's anonymity.

Attainment in literacy and English

- At early level and second level most children are making good progress in literacy. At first level children are making very good progress.

Listening and talking

- Almost all children listen well and successfully engage in conversation with adults and peers. At early level, most children take turns during class discussions. They should continue to expand their vocabulary through play. At first and second level, children build on the opinions and views of others during group work. They confidently discuss the skills required to talk to an audience or debate a topic in class.

Reading

- At early level, most children recognise familiar single sounds. They use pictorial clues to retell familiar stories and predict what might happen next. They make good use of their understanding of phonics to support their decoding of new words. At first level, most children read fluently. They summarise the main points and predict the meaning of new words using clues in the text. Children are confident in explaining the author's use of punctuation. At second level, most children generate and answer increasingly challenging questions about their class novel. They develop well their comprehension skills and understanding of new vocabulary through group reading. Children are familiar with the features of fiction and non-fiction. They are less confident in discussing an author's style and use of language.

Writing

- Children in P1 are making a good attempt at writing a few words independently using supports provided by the teacher. Most children who have achieved early level in the P1 to P4 class can write a few simple sentences independently. Most children form letters correctly and use capital letters and full stops well. At first level, most children write well across a range of genre. They use vocabulary to engage the reader and organise their writing using paragraphs. At second level, most children use increasingly complex sentences, and a few use a wider range of punctuation to capture and maintain the readers' interest. Children have good opportunities

to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Across the school, children now need to improve further spelling and the presentation of written work.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Across the school, most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Children at early level recognise ordinal numbers in real life contexts. They use one-to-one correspondence to count accurately within 20. They are less confident when identifying number names in written form and need support to link daily routines and events to time. Children at first level can multiply two-digit numbers by a single digit and use division facts to solve word problems. They can convert pounds into pence and hours into minutes. Children require support to solve two-step problems and to use coins to pay for a specific amount. Children at second level estimate well and have a good understanding of place value. They can convert simple fractions into percentages and draw a shape with a given area. They now need to improve their skills in dividing whole numbers to two decimal places and in calculating perimeters. Children should also be supported to develop their understanding of negative numbers and equivalent fractions.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, children recognise common two-dimensional shapes and simple three-dimensional objects, such as cylinders and cubes. Children at first level can draw a shape with a line of symmetry and recognise right angles. They need to develop further their knowledge of a wider range of three-dimensional objects. At second level, children recognise acute and obtuse angles.

Information handling

- Children working at early level identify information that may be found in familiar locations. They need support to explore a range of ways of collecting and displaying data. At first level, children accurately interpret data from a given source and explain how information might be gathered. They need to develop their ability to ask questions to extract key information. Children at second level can suggest alternative ways of displaying data and can interpret data from a range of sources. They should now develop further their understanding of the key features of a range of presentation formats.

Attainment over time

- The small roll and cohort size at Kirkcowan, has influenced trends in attainment data over time. Staff track individual children's progress in literacy and English and numeracy and Mathematics. They identify interventions and provide appropriate levels of support and challenge. As a result, despite a dip in overall attainment during the pandemic, most children are making good progress, and a few are making very good progress. Children with additional support needs continue to make good progress towards their targets.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children's achievements are celebrated through assemblies, newsletters and school displays. The school has achieved national success through Eco-Schools. Children participated well in Fèis Rois workshops and produced their own radio show. Children's range of achievements could be recognised further through official accreditation.
- Children continued to develop their leadership and citizenship skills through participation in class committees during the pandemic. Staff intend to relaunch whole school pupil committees for all children prior to Christmas. The headteacher acknowledges that it will be important for these groups to start more promptly in the future to ensure that children gain

maximum benefit from the experience. Children currently develop their leadership skills and self-esteem well through initiatives such as Relax Kids and Buddies.

- Teachers track effectively children's participation in clubs and activities that help children to develop skill and confidence in a range of areas. They take steps to ensure those not attending extra-curricular activities benefit from a lunchtime club led by Active Schools. As planned, teachers should now track progression in skills developed through wider achievement.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context of the rural community and are acutely aware of the challenges facing families. They seek and secure financial support from a range of sources and use this effectively to reduce or negate the cost of activities and resources. This is helping to ensure equity of opportunity.
- Staff have introduced initiatives such as the uniform swap and they actively encourage and support parents to apply for available grants. These approaches provide practical assistance to families and contribute to a strong sense of community within the school and across the village.
- The headteacher and teachers use Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) well to provide a range of targeted and universal interventions in health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. These are having a positive impact on children's attainment. Staff should continue to develop approaches to tracking the attainment of specific groups and to compare their progress with national standards. In doing this, they should ensure that children adversely affected by their socio-economic context make accelerated progress.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.