HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Summarised inspection findings

Cornbank St James Primary School

Midlothian Council

3 November 2026

Key contextual information

Cornbank St James School is a non-denominational school serving the community of Penicuik. Most children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 7-10. The current roll is 295 children across 12 classes. In addition, there is one complex needs class and a nursery. In September 2025 eight children had English as an additional language and 49% of children had a recorded additional support need (ASN). The headteacher has been in post for four years. The senior leadership team comprises of the headteacher and an acting depute headteacher who joined the school shortly before the inspection. In September 2025 5% of children in P6 and P7 were registered for free school meals.

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 model very positive relationships across the school. All members of the community demonstrate the school values of respect, inclusion, safety and excellence (#RISE) in their interactions with each other. As a result, children know that staff have high expectations of them. Children and teachers work well together to identify ways that they can model school values in classrooms and social areas. Each class has a well-considered class charter that reflects school values and has a focus on children's rights. Staff use these approaches to support children to have ownership of the ways they can demonstrate positive behaviours. As a result, almost all children engage positively in their learning.

- At the start of each school year, teachers plan for an 'estabishment phase' with their class. Teachers successfully establish classroom routines, set high expectations and build positive relationships with children. Teachers revisit this 'establishment phase' at the start of each term further strengthening this approach. It would also be of benefit for teachers to use this 'establishment phase' to set clear high expectations for the presentation of written work with children.

- Children learn in calm, inclusive and purposeful environments. Staff have collaborated well to identify ways that classrooms and workspaces can support children in their learning. Teachers work closely with children to identify ways that classrooms can support their wellbeing. All classrooms have designated calm areas. Children can access these areas for short periods of time when they feel they need to have space to manage their emotions. By having these areas set within classrooms, children are able to continue learning with their peers. Children access items that will support their sensory needs in each classroom. These approaches support children well to make appropriate choices to support their needs whilst keeping them involved

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in their learning. On the few occasions when children's behaviour becomes dysregulated, teachers use of well-selected strategies to support children help them reengage with learning.

- In most lessons, children engage well in a range of learning activities such as whole class discussion, group work and independent tasks. Children use personal digital devices confidently to support their learning through activities such as accessing notes and digital learning platforms. In most lessons, the pace of learning is appropriate for children. Where this is not the case, children can be disengaged with their learning. Teachers should consider how best to challenge all learners appropriately and increase the pace of learning.

- In almost all lessons, teachers provide clear instructions and explanations and make good use of questioning for understanding. Teachers have worked well together to develop a shared understanding of how best to share the purpose of learning and how children can be successful in their learning. The quality of this approach varies. Senior leaders and teachers should now consider how to share the strongest examples of this approach with a view to children having a more consistent experience in class. This should support greater consistency of application. Teachers are developing their understanding of skills for learning and life beyond school and how to make these explicit for learners. Most children link skills to their learning well and can confidently discuss how they can apply these skills.

- Across the school, almost all children learn French. They are developing their understanding of commonly used words and phrases. Children do not yet have a broad enough experience of learning languages to meet their full entitlement to Language Learning in Scotland 1+2. Senior leaders and staff should ensure that they continue to review their provision for children learning languages in line with national guidance.

- Teachers at the early level are developing approaches to children learning through play. Working with the local authority they carried out an audit to identify strengths and areas for development in play based learning. This led to the effective development of classroom environments which provide children with useful opportunities to explore and investigate. Teachers continue to develop the balance between child led-child initiated, adult-led and adult initiated learning. Teachers have developed useful assessment processes to measure children's engagement in learning and their demonstration of skills. A next step is to evaluate carefully the impact of play based learning on children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.

- Senior leaders and teachers are leading learning well. Teachers' professional enquiry projects align closely with whole school improvement priorities. Senior leaders identified formative assessment as a key focus for improvement. Teachers reviewed whole school approaches to the use of formative assessment and created a formative assessment matrix. Children's views were considered through the pupil conference and their suggestions are reflected in the matrix. This is supporting a more consistent and embedded approach to the use of formative assessment across the school.

- Teachers use an appropriate range of diagnostic and summative assessments, including National Standardised Assessments. Assessments are carried out at agreed key points in the school year. These assessments provide consistent information about children's attainment in literacy and numeracy at regular intervals. Senior leaders and teachers use assessment

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information to identify gaps in learning and plan targeted interventions and support. As planned, staff should assess children's progress across a wider range of curricular areas.

- Teachers engage regularly in helpful informal moderation with stage partners and colleagues across the school. They also participate in Associated Schools Group (ASG) moderation activities, with some staff contributing to wider moderation working groups. This is supporting staff to develop their understanding of national standards. As a next step, teachers should develop a more systematic approach to the full moderation cycle.

- Teachers plan children's learning effectively for all curriculum areas using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). They have developed a consistent approach to planning learning. Teachers plan collaboratively with stage partners outlining where they will apply the principles of curriculum design such as relevance, breadth and depth within learning. Teachers use local authority literacy and numeracy progression frameworks. They use these frameworks effectively to plan consistently for progression as children move through CfE levels.

- Senior leaders and teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of children who require additional support with their learning. They work well with a range of partners to provide appropriate support where needed. Learning assistants and teachers deliver a wide range of targeted interventions in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and teachers should evaluate carefully the impact of interventions. This will help identify those interventions that have the most impact on each child's progress.

- Teachers review evidence of children's progress and attainment in literacy and numeracy during tracking meetings. They gather and review a wide range of data to make decisions whether children require additional support or challenge in their learning. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop their approaches to analysing data to identify clearly the progress and attainment of specific groups of children.

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2.1 Safeguarding

- 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.

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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

- Overall, most children work within national expectations in literacy and numeracy. Children's attainment is lower at the middle stages. Teachers have identified reading and listening and talking as a priority for raising attainment this session. Across the school, a few children work ahead of national expectations within aspects of literacy and numeracy. The headteacher has correctly identified that strengthening universal and targeted approaches to providing children with challenge will raise attainment further.

- The majority of children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English.

- Most children confidently share their ideas and experiences and contribute to class and group discussions. Most can take turns appropriately and are developing vocabulary and confidence to express thoughts clearly. Children across all levels, use their knowledge of letter sounds and spelling rules to read fluently as appropriate for their age and stage. At first level most children would benefit from further support to develop confidence with their comprehension skills. Most children communicate their ideas in writing in an age-appropriate way. At second level children articulate their next steps in writing and identify specific features of different genres. Across the school children need more regular opportunities to write at greater length across a wider range of genres. Teachers should continue to support children to present written work accurately with the correct spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

- Most children who are working towards the end of early and second level have a firm understanding of number concepts as appropriate to their age and stage. Children who have achieved first level should continue to consolidate their knowledge of times tables, oral addition and subtraction to support fluency and accuracy in mental calculations. Across the school, all children would benefit from regular opportunities to record calculations in written form to support their use of mathematical notation and deepen their learning. Children participate in

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weekly lessons covering mathematical concepts beyond number which is helping them to develop a secure understanding of shape and information handling.

Attainment over time

- Overall, most children make good progress over time in literacy and numeracy. For the last few years, staff have implemented well their strategy to raising attainment through improving children's engagement in learning.

- The headteacher provides a clear, strategic approach to tracking children's attainment. She works with teachers well to review a range of data during robust tracking meetings. These meetings help teachers to identify trends and patterns in attainment over time in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher and teachers should continue to develop their skills in data analysis of specific groups and cohorts.

- Teachers gather a wide range of relevant assessment data which is helping them to make increasingly accurate professional judgements about children's attainment. Teachers recognise there is still a need to ensure professional judgements are fully robust. As part of school improvement planning, teachers are strengthening their approaches to planning and assessing listening and talking this session. In addition, it would be helpful for staff to consider a whole school approach to raising attainment in writing.

- Teachers share detailed transition information as children move from stage to stage, including from when children enter P1 and move onto secondary school. For example, teachers pass on children's assessment folders, forward planning information, assessment results and individual educational plans. This supports teachers to ensure children have continuity in their learning.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children at all stages have meaningful opportunies to achieve success through pupil voice groups such as the rights respecting group, reading, expressive arts, wellbeing and sports. Children develop a wide range of important skills through participating in these groups such as creativity, sporting, organisational, leadership and teamworking skills. Children in the upper stages demonstrate their leadership, communication and organisational skills as house captains. Teachers should consider how to develop meaningful leadership roles for children in other stages.

- Children and staff are rightly proud of whole school achievements and in particular their notable success in receving a 10th Eco Schools Scotland green flag, evidencing their committment to sustainability. Children who act as community champions work closely with children in other local schools to contribute effectively to the local community. Children enjoy participating in Penicuik's Hunter and Lass week and taking part in competitions organised by the local Rotary group. In addition, children and staff have achieved the Sports Scotland Gold award and a digital wellbeing award, which is supporting children to develop skills in keeping themselves safe online. Children are building their confidence through these achievements.

- Children have regular opportunities to share their personal achievements within their class and on the school's online platform. Teachers should continue to develop more effective tracking of children's wider achievements. This will help identify areas where children need to develop their skills further. It would also identify any children who need support to achieve more.

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Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders are aware of the potential impact of financial barriers on children's progress and attainment. Staff take appropriate steps to minimise the cost of the school day. A range of sensitive and inclusive approaches are in place, including support with the costs of trips and access to pre-loved uniform. Parents feel confident approaching the school when they require support. Staff signpost families appropriately to sources of financial assistance. Staff ensure that fundraising and charitable activities are inclusive, raising children's awareness of important causes without an expectation to make a financial contribution. The school has also received an award for consistent implentation of visual supports within the school environment. This approach supports inclusion and promotes equity well.

- Senior leaders have created a plan for the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). They use PEF to provide interventions for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and staff should use robust measures to evaluate the impact of funded interventions on closing the identified gaps.

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Quality of provision of Cornbank St James Primary Acorn Class

Context

The Acorn Class within Cornbank St. James Primary School, established in August 2024, supports children with complex additional support and communication needs from across Midlothian. The current roll is eight children across stages P1-P3. There is one full-time class teacher and two full-time learning assistants. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the Acorn Class. A few children have a shared placement with a mainstream primary school.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- The Acorn Class is an integral and valued part of the school. The nurturing staff team ensure that the needs, including communication and sensory needs, of all the children are met consistently and deftly. The staff know the children well, hence most learning activities are suitable structured. As a result, most children engage well in, and demonstrate that they enjoy, their learning.

- Positive relationships between staff and children are evident. Staff employ the 'My Predictable Day' visual and auditory approaches effectively to support children with their daily routines. As a result, transitions throughout the day are smooth and timely, ensuring that learning and teaching time is maximised. Dysregulated behaviour is minimal as a result of strategies, such as redirection, that staff apply calmly and consistently.

- The purpose of learning is communicated to children using visual and communication strategies that meet class and individual needs. For example, augmentative and alternative communication strategies such as a sign supported communication system, portable speech devices and visual chat sheets. Staff, alongside partners, should continue to explore the use of digital technologies to offer further support with communication.

- Staff use a range of creative resources and teaching approaches well to engage children in their learning. For example, sensory tray activities when exploring topics such as "Woodland".

- Staff use questioning well to check children's understanding. Children are provided with ample processing time to help meet their support needs. Most lessons are differentiated appropriately to extend learning for a few children. The majority of children have previously accessed learning with their mainstream peers. Where appropriate teachers should continue to explore and plan further opportunities for children to learn alongside their mainstream peers.

- Teachers employ a range of assessment approaches to inform next steps for individual children. These range from observation, the use of the continuum of engagement, to more formal assessments such as an early into first level bridging matrix. Teachers assessments are informed by the pre-early milestones and CfE. Their development of digital learning journalling is further strengthening assessment and reporting.

- Staff refer to the local authority's progression planners, the core curriculum, pre-early milestones, and CfE experiences and outcomes when planning. They consider the individual learning plans and communication needs of every child, taking account of their learning

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targets. Teachers plan over short, medium and long term with assessment integral to planning. Teachers use a topic-based approach effectively to deliver a range of curricular areas across a common theme. Teachers have recently introduced a digital tracking and monitoring system. They should continue to embed this to ensure there is clear information on children's attainment within all curriculum areas.

- Teachers plan alongside P1 and P2 staff from within the school. As a next step, teachers would benefit from further planning and moderation with staff from other ASN provisions.

Raising attainment and achievement

- Most children are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. A few children are making very good progress.

- Teachers are beginning to capture robust attainment data via an online tracking and monitoring system, at pre-early milestones through to CfE first level. This is currently in place for literacy and numeracy, and a next step is to track health and wellbeing. Staff should continue to build on their recent development of tracking and monitoring to evidence better individual children's attainment over time within all curricular areas.

- This session, the children are attending weekly French lessons. Children are beginning to explore French vocabulary, for example colours. Staff should continue to support the children to learn in a range of environments, for example the practical cooking area.

- Staff work collaboratively with staff across the school to ensure there are meaningful achievement activities that meet the interests of the children. Children develop well skills such as communication, signing, gross motor skills and independence. They do this across a variety of activities such as physical education lessons, regular mile walks, sports days and community outings. They enjoy attending whole school assemblies each Friday.

- Children demonstrate confidence in social situations, for example when meeting new people. The children are all going to be involved with the expressive arts pupil voice group this session. Staff should work on providing children with meaningful choices in the activities they participate in.

- Senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of children's support needs. They consider equity of opportunity well. For example, to overcome any barriers to transition, they offer children and families visits during school holiday periods. As a result, transitions into the school and Acorn Class are managed effectively, enabling children to settle quickly and confidently.

- Staff work in partnership with families to promote consistent communication approaches across home and school. They share practical resources, such as visual charts, and support families to use signing. As a result, children are developing their communications skills well both at home and school.

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Other relevant evidence

- Overall attendance at the time of inspection was 94.5%, which has decreased by less than 1% over a three-year period. This is in line with the national average. The rate of persistent absence (attendance below 90%) is 7.7%. This has been at a steady level for three years. The headteacher closely monitors attendance and works with children and families to support children whose attendance is below 90%. She is able to demonstrate the reasons for absences and successful approaches to increasing attendance. A number of absences are linked to family holidays within term time.

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Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard HMIE 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.

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.

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