

Summarised inspection findings

Meldrum School

Aberdeenshire Council

10 February 2026

Key contextual information

Meldrum School is a non-denominational school located in the town of Oldmeldrum in Aberdeenshire. There are 383 children organised across 15 mainstream classes. The school also provides learning provision for children with additional support needs in its Enhanced Provision (EP). Children travel to attend the EP from across the cluster. There are six children within the EP class.

The senior leadership team consists of a headteacher, two depute headteachers and a principal teacher. The headteacher has been in post for five years. One of the depute headteachers has a 0.4 full time equivalent class teaching commitment. At the time of inspection, the principal teacher was in post as acting depute headteacher.

Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation areas 5-10. In the mainstream classes, the school reports 27% of children as requiring additional support.

1.3 Leadership of change	satisfactory
This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are: ■ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community ■ strategic planning for continuous improvement ■ implementing improvement and change	

- The school values of achieving, included and my community were agreed in 2024 and are understood by all. All staff model these values well to develop children’s understanding and application of them. The school’s values are evident in almost all everyday practices. Children receive recognition of demonstration of their values through certificates, house points and rewards. As a result, children are highly motivated to learn about the school values and talk confidently about them. They take pride in sharing the values, including through signing approaches, which they learn alongside children from the EP.
- The headteacher, with support from the depute headteachers, has developed an inclusive, nurturing environment. Together, they provide effective leadership and have a clear vision for the school. They have created a collaborative and supportive culture across the school. This is encouraging all staff to be reflective in their practice to improve outcomes for children. All staff work effectively as a team and work hard to develop positive relationships with children and families. They are well placed to now focus more on school improvements.
- Senior leaders monitor the work of the school. They have created a quality assurance calendar which outlines the range of approaches used to evaluate the quality and impact of children’s learning experiences. Following self-evaluation activities, senior leaders provide individual teachers with feedback detailing identified strengths and next steps. They have begun to develop and share whole school overviews with staff which highlight collective areas for development. For example, the monitoring of jotters resulted in the production of a jotter

policy which clearly outlines the expectations in this area. This has not yet been fully implemented. Senior leaders need to continue to ensure that all identified areas for development are actioned and lead to sustained improvements.

- Senior leaders use surveys and feedback at school events to seek parental views to support their evaluation of the work of the school. The Parent Council engages well in discussions about school improvement priorities through headteacher updates. Feedback from parents helps shape decision making positively within the school. For example, parental feedback influenced the current school priority to review and develop the relationship and behaviour policy and procedures. A majority of parents are aware of how the school takes their views into account when making changes. Senior leaders should continue to develop approaches to involve all parents more fully in the self-evaluation process. They should ensure that stakeholders fully understand how their views inform and influence change.
- Senior leaders create clear plans to help support improvement. These outline actions, timeframes and the allocated areas of responsibility. The headteacher recognises that school improvement priorities need to have clear, measurable targets which are reviewed regularly by all staff, using robust evidence. Teachers have developed a stronger understanding of their role in evaluating the work of the school. Staff complete a range of surveys and use the How good is our school? 4th edition to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Senior leaders should involve all stakeholders more fully in developing plans for continuous improvement. This should help ensure that they gain a greater understanding of the rationale for change and the desired outcomes of any planned actions.
- Almost all staff are committed fully to improving outcomes for children. The headteacher is developing successfully a culture which is promoting leadership at all levels. The majority of staff undertake leadership opportunities and share responsibility for aspects of school improvement. For example, teachers have led improvements to their approaches to teaching writing, the development of play in early years and improvements to whole school assessments. Teachers value these opportunities. They speak positively about how professional learning in these areas and changes to their practice impact positively on children's outcomes. For example, as a result of improvements to the teaching of writing, children are more engaged and have improved the quality of their writing. Teachers are not involved in reviewing and evaluating the ongoing impact of all new approaches they implement. They need to take shared ownership of change and improvement. In doing so, they should look outwards and learn from others at local and national levels to ensure changes are evidence-based and lead to improved outcomes for children.
- Children value the chance to make contributions to the wider life of the school. Staff have recently changed their approach to gathering pupil views. They now provide weekly opportunities through pupil voice sessions. Almost all children have begun to share their thoughts and opinions on aspects of school life. For example, children were recently asked their thoughts about approaches to behaviour management. Senior leaders plan to use this feedback to influence their relationships policy. A majority of children feel that staff listen to their views about a wide range of aspects of school life. However, they are unsure if staff act on their ideas. Staff need to ensure children clearly see how their views lead to changes. They should develop further children's opportunities to reflect on, evaluate and improve the work of the school.

- Most older children benefit from opportunities to take on leadership roles. They are proud to be house captains, eco group members and reading ambassadors. They contribute effectively to influencing change. For example, children in the eco group organise 'free from Fridays' and 'fruit Fridays'. These events promote litter reduction and encourage children to make healthier food choices. Children also develop their leadership skills in the classroom and throughout the school with a variety of responsibilities. Older children support younger children during their learning and through paired reading activities. This is helping to promote important leadership skills in the older children, including communication and relationship building. Staff should build on this practice by extending leadership opportunities for all children.
- Most staff have a clear understanding of the social and economic context of the school. The headteacher, in consultation with staff, has developed a plan for the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to support raising attainment across the school. Senior leaders should use data more effectively to identify the poverty related attainment gap and inform the strategic planning for the use of PEF. They need to ensure all staff, children and parents are fully consulted on how PEF is used each year. The current PEF plan includes funding the provision of support staff to provide targeted interventions and run a breakfast club. This is supporting a few children to have a positive start to the day. They should also ensure that approaches to monitoring and evaluating the impact of all PEF interventions are clear, robust and understood by all. This should allow them to demonstrate their success in closing the poverty related attainment gap.

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

- Positive relationships are evident between children and adults and amongst children. Almost all children work well as individuals, in pairs and as members of larger groups when they undertake learning tasks together. They demonstrate the school's expectations of being ready, respectful and safe when they are learning. Staff use praise effectively to build children's self-confidence. As a result, almost all children behave well and enjoy learning. They are friendly, polite and eager to talk about their learning and are proud to be part of the Meldrum school community.
- In all classes children's learning is relevant to their age and stage. Children learn in well organised and inclusive classrooms. They easily access a range of appropriate materials to support their learning. Displays throughout the school reflect children's learning, views, and achievements. Almost all children engage enthusiastically in learning, particularly when lessons are connected to real, challenging, and meaningful contexts. Across early and first level, a minority of children are easily distracted. They need more direction to listen attentively to adults and to their peers.
- Children have shared access to digital devices. At the early stages they are learning to use technology to capture their successes in learning. Children in the middle stages use digital applications and programmes confidently to support and reinforce their learning. In the upper stages, children regularly use technology to organise information, share learning and to develop further newly acquired skills in coding. Teachers use interactive boards effectively to introduce lessons, model learning and record children's contributions. Staff should ensure that children at all stages have increased opportunities to use digital devices to enhance their learning.
- All teachers are developing well their use of the Meldrum learning and teaching expectations to provide children with recognised structures and routines for learning. In all classes, teachers help children build on what they already know and can do to confidently approach new learning concepts. In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning and what children need to do to be successful. In the majority of lessons, the intended learning is referred to frequently throughout the lesson. In a few classes, teachers support effectively children to identify their own steps to success. As planned, senior leaders and teachers should work together to ensure this positive practice is consistent across all classes. They should help children understand better the progress they are making and empower them to take greater ownership of their

learning. In almost all classes, at the end of lessons, teachers encourage children to reflect on how well they have learned.

- In almost all classes, questioning is used well to check children's learning and understanding. In a minority of lessons, teachers use questioning to challenge children's thinking, supporting the development of higher order thinking skills. In almost all classes, teachers support children to identify and evaluate their meta skills. Staff have recently introduced meta skills reflection toolkits to engage children further in high-quality learning conversations. As a result, most children can explain the skills they are using and developing in their learning. All teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to children about their learning. In the majority of classes this is explicitly linked to the intended learning and the skills being developed. This positive practice should be extended. The quality of written feedback is variable. All teachers need to provide consistent, high-quality written feedback for children. They should ensure that children are fully aware of where they are being successful and their next steps in learning.
- Most teachers provide lessons which are well structured. Almost all teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. A minority of children would benefit from increased challenge, including being able to start their independent learning activities more quickly. A minority of lessons are overly teacher directed and in the majority of classes too much learning time is lost during transitions. Senior leaders should work with teachers to increase the pace of learning to better meet the needs of all children.
- Teachers at the early stages are developing their understanding of play. They use assessment information effectively to plan play activities that build children's skills and reinforce key learning. Senior leaders and teachers have rightly identified the need for a shared, progressive play framework supported by training and professional learning. Moving forward, teachers should consider how to use play throughout the school to provide engaging and challenging play experiences for all children.
- Teachers have developed and are at the early stages of implementing an assessment calendar, which provides them with a helpful structure. They use a variety of assessments well to evaluate and track children's progress, including local authority literacy and numeracy assessments, cluster frameworks, and National Standardised Assessments. Teachers use diagnostic assessments effectively to identify and address barriers to learning. Senior leaders should support teachers to undertake regular and robust moderation activities in school and with colleagues in other schools. Together they should develop a shared understanding of national standards across all areas of the curriculum.
- A few teachers apply formative assessment strategies well to engage children and accurately gauge their understanding. These strategies ensure all children actively contribute to class discussions and plenaries. This approach should be developed and used consistently across all classes. All teachers collate examples of successful learning and assessment in literacy and numeracy for children as they move through school. They have rightly identified the need to include children more effectively in setting and reviewing learning targets. They should continue to help children understand and articulate better their progress over time.
- Teachers plan learning thoroughly across short, medium, and long-term periods. They use structured frameworks well for all curriculum areas. Helpful overviews of key experiences and outcomes to be covered ensure continuity and progression of learning. Teachers use termly

plans to outline assessment methods and show how children's ideas and interests will be incorporated. As a result, their planning is becoming more consistent and focussed on improving outcomes for children. Senior leaders meet regularly with teachers to evaluate the impact of planning on ensuring quality learning experiences for children. Teachers should continue to work together to increase children's opportunities to contribute to planning, leading and evaluating their learning experiences.

- Teachers track well children's progress in literacy and numeracy. They meet termly with senior leaders to discuss the progress of individual children. Teachers know children very well. They have begun to use a wide range of assessments to plan interventions for individuals and groups of children who require additional support and challenge. Senior leaders recognise the need to regularly monitor the impact of targeted interventions with teachers and Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) and evaluate better the progress children are making. Senior leaders and staff need to track children's progress across the curriculum.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use progression pathways well to plan across all curricular areas. These pathways use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes, and reflect the design principles. Teachers use curriculum planners effectively to outline learning experiences in literacy and numeracy.
- Teachers have developed and use a whole school approach to the planning and assessment of learning which links different curricular areas. This has begun to ensure that children have more ownership of and choice in what and how they learn. There is scope to involve children more fully in the planning of topics. This should increase further their personalisation and choice and allow them to demonstrate skills and knowledge in new and unfamiliar contexts.
- Teachers have a strong focus on developing children's meta skills. This supports children to make clear links with their learning in school and in activities beyond the classroom. Almost all children regularly attend 'OTTER (Our Time Together Enhancing Relationships) Club'. This is well planned with a clear whole school focus on skills development. Teachers consistently provide relevant opportunities for children to develop and apply skills progressively. Staff organise career events where community partners and parents explain to children the skills they require for their chosen career. Children enjoy these events and make links successfully to the skills they have been developing at 'OTTER Club'.
- Children across the school learn French as part of the 1 + 2 language programme, in a planned and progressive way. Children in P7 are being introduced to Mandarin through links with the local secondary school. Children enjoy learning about their local dialect, Doric through storytelling. They would now benefit from learning Doric through a progressive approach.
- Children receive their entitlement of two hours of high-quality physical education (PE) every week. Staff use outdoor spaces well to support the delivery of PE. Teachers use a PE progression framework effectively to plan an appropriate range of learning experiences for children.
- Teachers share helpful information about children's progress, ensuring children move from stage to stage in their learning successfully. This includes moving from nursery to school, between classes in the primary and from primary to secondary.
- Outdoor learning is an increasing feature of learning across the school. Most teachers make good use of the school grounds to provide opportunities to extend learning. They are beginning to develop programmes of work and outdoor learning resources, such as well-planned activities using loose parts. As a result, children are able to develop and demonstrate relevant skills in a range of contexts.
- All children have opportunities to learn about Christianity and other world religions through a progressive pathway for religious and moral education. Through this they celebrate significant religious events and festivals.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Most parents are supportive of the work of the school. They feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or suggestions. Most parents feel that staff effectively support their child's emotional wellbeing. They state that the staff know their children well.
- The majority of parents value helpful, regular feedback about how their child is learning and developing. They receive this through informal feedback, class termly updates, consultation appointments and reports. Senior leaders share valuable information about curricular workshops and school events through whole school newsletters. Parents would appreciate additional guidance on how to support their child's learning at home.
- The school enjoys the support of a proactive Parent Council, Meldrum Parents in Partnership (MPiP). Most parents feel encouraged to participate in the activities of the MPiP. They raise considerable funds which provide financial support for school resources, school trips and events.

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, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Strong positive relationships between staff and children are evident across the school. Most children feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect. Relationships among staff, children, and peers reflect the school's core values and are supported by a clear commitment to upholding children's rights. Staff model these values in their interactions. As a result, most children feel safe at school and can name a trusted adult to talk to if they have any worries or concerns.
- Staff have engaged in meaningful professional learning, including restorative approaches and strategies for creating nurturing, inclusive learning environments. This has led to a strong, shared understanding of how best to support children in their learning. Most children feel respected and included within the school community. Staff know each child well and provide sensitive, individualised support when needed. They make highly effective use of visual supports to help children manage the school day and understand the planned learning activities. As a result, these targeted approaches have contributed to a calm, purposeful learning environment, with almost all children demonstrating positive behaviour. Children need supported to manage their behaviour in less structured environments, such as in the playground and during transitions. Senior leaders should support all staff to consider how these strategies can be applied to promote positive behaviour and wellbeing beyond the classroom.
- The majority of children report that they are listened to and that their views influence decisions within the school community. Children from P4-P7 are beginning to reflect on their wellbeing using the wellbeing indicators. This is introducing them to the language of wellbeing. Staff have begun to use the results of children's reflections well to identify individual concerns and common themes. They have begun to address these through assemblies and class-based learning. Regular emotional check-ins provide children with opportunities to express their feelings and receive appropriate support. Staff should continue to build on this good practice by ensuring that all children have regular opportunities to engage with wellbeing activities. They should support every child to articulate how they feel and seek help when needed.
- Staff deliver a clear and progressive health and wellbeing curriculum that effectively supports children to develop a strong understanding of key health topics. Most children explain confidently how to stay safe online, demonstrating secure awareness of internet safety. Older children articulate clearly the risks associated with vaping and smoking. Across the school, most children demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of positive relationships. They describe confidently the different types of relationships they may have, such as

friendships, family connections, and peer interactions. A few children in P7 created a presentation on consent to share with younger children. This helped them discuss why it is important to ask permission before physical contact, such as hugging. These approaches ensure that most children have a well-developed understanding of health and wellbeing and can apply this knowledge in real-life contexts.

- Most children talk well about how staff support their physical wellbeing. They understand the link between physical activity and mental health. Children benefit from a wide range of physical activities, including PE lessons, lunchtime activities, and after-school clubs. These activities are supported by volunteers and students from the local college and academy. Children represent the school in local sporting events, such as netball and football. These experiences improve physical fitness and develop teamwork, cooperation, and social skills.
- Senior leaders implement local authority and national guidelines appropriately when managing and recording incidents of bullying. Most children report feeling reassured by the school's response to bullying concerns. However, a minority of children and parents would welcome further clarity and support in this area. Senior leaders need to work with staff, pupils and parents to create an anti-bullying policy, which reflects national advice. They should ensure that there is a shared understanding of what constitutes bullying, how concerns can be reported, and what support is available. Senior leaders should also ensure that stakeholders feel informed and confident in the school's approach.
- Most staff understand the context of the school, know children well and recognise their duties in relation to child protection. They engage in appropriate professional learning such as emotional regulation, child protection and restorative approaches. As a result, children experience improved emotional wellbeing and stronger relationships. The majority of children who are identified for additional interventions are supported well through small groups to make appropriate progress in their learning. PSAs are effectively deployed. They support children by increasing their motivation and engagement in learning. Where needed, children access a range of supports such as ear defenders, fidget toys, and assistive technologies to help them regulate, engage with learning, and develop greater independence. This supports ensure children are less distracted and more actively engaged in lessons.
- Staff work well with partners, such as allied health professionals and local authority staff, to plan and deliver appropriate time limited individualised interventions. An important next step is for senior leaders to review how plans for children's additional support are created. Senior leaders should ensure plans are clear, concise, and coherent. Plans need to streamline the current information held on each child so that support is consistently and effectively organised. Every child's plan should include specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant targets to provide the right level of support. Senior leaders must ensure parents and children are fully involved in setting and reviewing these targets at regular planning meetings. This should ensure that children receive more targeted and effective support. Senior leaders should also continue to refine approaches for determining whether care-experienced children require a coordinated support plan.
- Children's rights have a high profile and are well understood across the school. Children and staff create helpful class charters and lead assemblies so that the school community understand the importance of their rights. Senior leaders make effective use of assemblies to promote children's understanding of equality and diversity. Black History Month, World

Refugee Day, and International Women’s Day are explored throughout the year. Most children demonstrate a sound understanding of the challenges their peers may face. They show empathy towards their peers, explaining clearly that the needs of others can differ to their own. Collaborative initiatives, such as children and staff selecting new library books that promote inclusion, diversity, and equality, further strengthen this work. A few classes engage with texts to deepen learning in these areas. To build on this strong foundation, staff should provide more frequent opportunities across the curriculum for all children to learn about equality and inclusion. They should continue to support all children to feel confident to recognise and challenge discrimination and intolerance whenever it arises.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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, attainment in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. In session 2024/25, almost all children at early level achieved nationally expected CfE levels in listening and talking and numeracy and most achieved in reading and writing. Most children at first level achieved in talking and listening and the majority achieved in reading and writing. A minority of children at first level achieved in numeracy. At second level, a majority of children achieved in talking and listening, reading and numeracy and a minority achieved in writing. Across the school, a few children are exceeding expectations. A few children are capable of achieving more in reading, writing and numeracy.
- Most children with additional support needs make satisfactory progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English. Staff rightly identified the need to raise attainment in writing. They have recently introduced a new approach to teaching writing. Early signs show that this is accelerating children's progress towards attaining national expectations.

Listening and talking

- Children who have achieved early level recount experiences, stories and events in a logical sequence for different purposes. They now need to use their listening skills more consistently when others are talking. Children who have achieved first level make relevant notes under given headings and can use these for different purposes. A minority of children need to apply a few verbal and non-verbal techniques when engaging with others, for example, vocabulary, eye contact, expression and body language. Most children who are working at second level plan and deliver an organised talk with relevant content and appropriate structure. Across the school, children would benefit in developing and applying their listening and talking skills in a range of contexts and to a variety of different audiences.

Reading

- Children who have achieved early level hear and say sounds made by a combination of letters. They should use knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read words more confidently. Children who have achieved first level read aloud a familiar piece of text adding expression and show understanding. They are less confident using context cues to read and understand

unknown vocabulary and texts. The majority of children working at second level make relevant comments about aspects of the writer's style, use of language and other features appropriate to genre, with reference to the text. They should develop their skills in scanning texts to find key information.

Writing

- Children who have achieved early level use known sounds to attempt to spell common words. They write short phrases or a sentence to convey a simple idea. They should continue to practise accurate letter formation. Children who have achieved first level create texts with recognisable features of genre. They should increase their use of common conjunctions, for example, and, because, to link sentences to extend their writing. The majority of children working at second level attempt to engage the reader through vocabulary and use of language as appropriate to genre. They should now have more opportunities to review and correct writing to ensure it makes sense, is technically accurate and meets its purpose. Children need to develop further their skills in creating extended texts regularly for a range of purposes and audiences selecting appropriate genre, form, structure and style.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, the majority of children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Children who have achieved early level work confidently with numbers to 20. They are confident in ordering numbers 0-20 and count forward and backward from zero. Children would benefit further from a focus on number formation. Children who have achieved first level confidently read, write, order and recite whole numbers to 1000. They solve addition and subtraction problems with three-digit whole numbers. They are not yet confident when demonstrating strategies to determine division facts. The majority of children working at second level accurately round decimal fractions to the nearest whole number and to one decimal place. They are confident when finding equivalent fractions, decimals and percentages. They are not yet confident when asked to calculate simple percentages of quantities.

Shape, position and movement

- Children who have achieved early level confidently identify and sort two-dimensional (2D) shapes using different criteria. They describe common objects using appropriate measurement language, including tall and heavy. Children who have achieved first level name, identify and classify a range of simple 2D shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. The majority of children working at second level accurately describe properties of 3D objects and 2D shapes using specific vocabulary including vertices, faces, radius, diameter and circumference. They are not yet able to calculate accurately missing angles.

Information handling

- Children who have achieved early level display and interpret simple graphs. They need to develop their skills in using tally marks appropriately to gather data in surveys. Children who have achieved first level confidently extract key information from a variety of data sets including charts, diagrams, bar graphs and tables. The majority of children working at second level confidently analyse, interpret and draw conclusions from a variety of data sets. Across the school, children should use digital technologies to organise and display a range of data.

Attainment over time

- The school's overall attendance average in June 2025 was 94.66% and has gradually increased over the past few years. When there is a concern around falling attendance, senior leaders are proactive in working with parents to improve and support this. Senior leaders communicate regularly with parents about the importance of good attendance and its impact on attainment. A few children, across all stages, have attendance below 90%. Reasons for this are wide and varied. For example, extended holidays, family circumstances and ill health. A few children attending school on a part-time 'flexi' basis do so in accordance with local authority procedures. Senior leaders should ensure that these arrangements are regularly reviewed. There have been no exclusions this session.
- Senior leaders track attainment over time. Attainment over time has been variable at key stages for a number of years. Senior leaders have identified several reasons for lower patterns of attainment in some areas and stages. This has included periods of instability in staffing and a lack of consistency in the use of assessments to support teachers' professional judgements. Recent improvements to assessments and planned moderation of standards should support them to ensure that attainment data is more accurate and reliable. Senior leaders and teachers now need to track more effectively the progress of cohorts and groups of children over time. Senior leaders have identified the need to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. They should use their data to prioritise further areas for targeted improvement.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children are proud to share their achievements in and out of school. These are celebrated at school assemblies, through classroom displays and in the school newsletter. All children in P6 form the eco-committee and in P7, all children are house captains. This is helping older children to develop leadership and citizenship skills. Children who play musical instruments talk enthusiastically about the musical skills they develop and the success they experience. Children in P1, P4 and P7 take part in performances at Christmas. This is supporting them to be confident individuals and effective contributors. There is scope to provide children across the school with increased opportunities to achieve.
- Throughout the school children value when staff recognise their in-school achievements. This is celebrated through the awarding of house points, certificates and recognition awards. These celebrations are an incentive to children and provide them with a sense of pride and accomplishment.
- Senior leaders have now recognised the need to track children's wider achievements to ensure that no children are at risk of missing out. Additionally, school staff should now support children to apply their understanding of meta-skills to identify and track the skills they are developing through their wider achievements.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff have a strong awareness of the socio-economic background of children and their families. They know the children and their families well. Staff should continue to work with parents to mitigate the impact of the cost the school day on families. They provide a pre-loved uniform swap, breakfast for a few children and apply for grant funding to help finance school events. Senior leaders secure financial support for the P7 residential excursion. This support helps children to participate fully in the life of the school.

- The headteacher uses PEF to fund additional support staff and resources. These are targeted on improving outcomes for identified children. This includes staff to run a breakfast club and provide targeted support in class. Senior leaders now need to monitor regularly the impact of interventions on outcomes for children. This includes evidencing the progress they are making in accelerating the closing of the poverty-related attainment gap.

Context

Due to low numbers within the EP, only general statements will be made to avoid inadvertent identification of individual children.

The EP, locally known as The Den, is a local authority specialist provision for children with a range and complexity of additional support needs. There is one class made up of children from P3 to P7. At the time of the inspection, six children attended. Children may have a blended placement between The Den and their mainstream class or, spend all of their time in The Den.

Children are placed by the local authority at The Den. Almost all children reside within the catchment area for the local secondary school. Children who have a placement allocated at The Den move onto the Meldrum School roll.

Currently, all children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 9 and 10. All are recorded as having an additional support need.

Leadership of change

- Senior leaders and staff work effectively to establish a specialist provision that places the needs of the children at the centre. Their commitment to providing children with an inclusive learning experience underpins the school's vision and values. They realise their aspirations that children will experience inclusion, succeed and make progress with their development. This is supporting most children to achieve positive educational outcomes.
- Teachers seek out relevant opportunities to enhance their practice to help children build and increase their communication skills and participation in learning. They benefit from attending local authority professional learning that is developing their capacity to support children. For example, in utilising their professional learning they reduce children's barriers to learning through the application of signing, gesturing and promotion of inclusive classrooms. Teachers in the provision are using their professional learning effectively to support staff in the school develop their approaches to communicating with children. This is ensuring an increasing number of staff use gesture and sign to help children from The Den participate in mainstream class activities.
- Support staff engage purposefully with the teachers to build their capacity to work with children effectively. As a result, they are developing well their skills to meet the needs of the children. Support staff would now benefit from a strategic approach to coordinating and identifying their professional learning. This will help them have dedicated space across the school year to enhance, develop and embed practices and ensure a consistency of approach.
- Senior leaders, staff and local authority officers should consider ways to provide teachers in The Den with systematic and increased opportunities to engage in professional dialogue, collegiate learning and regular self-evaluation activity with colleagues out with the school. In doing so, senior leaders should seek opportunities for teachers to observe high-quality practice in other specialist provisions or schools. This has the potential to help teachers meet the increasingly complex support needs of children attending The Den.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- Staff are very effective in establishing a class setting where children feel included and safe. Staff are highly nurturing and have created a settled classroom where children and staff demonstrate kindness. This helps most children engage positively with learning activities and share spaces. Overall, learning experiences are motivating and support children to apply their skills practically. As a result, most children are inquisitive and confident when participating in their learning. Senior leaders and staff should now consider ways to ensure all children are fully engaged in learning activities throughout the day.
- Staff are skilled at helping children regulate their behaviour and emotions. They know the children very well which enables them to support children at the right time before behaviours escalate. Staff are trained in disengagement, nurturing approaches and inclusive practices. They apply a range of useful strategies to remove the requirement for physical interventions. They work effectively with children to help them identify and use spaces in class that help them regulate and remain calm.
- In most activities, teachers provide clear instructions to children and appropriate differentiated learning. In doing so, they utilise well children's preferred communication approach. This includes teachers helping children to use augmentative and alternative communication, tablets, visual timetables and symbols to support children's communication and understanding. In all activities, there is regular and purposeful use of signing approaches to support children's communication. Staff should continue to develop ways to help children become more independent in learning.
- Teachers plan and set most learning activities at the right level of difficulty for children. They use Milestones for learning and CfE experiences and outcomes appropriately to plan learning. Teachers use assessment information to accurately judge the progress children make in learning. Senior leaders and teachers now need to work together to ensure assessment and evaluation of learning helps children demonstrate fully their knowledge, skills and capabilities.
- Teachers are implementing a new approach to tracking and monitoring the progress children make in learning. This is not yet providing clear information on the attainment or progress children make. Senior leaders need to work with teachers to continue to implement tracking and monitoring approaches that provide a clearer overview of children's progress. This includes working together to identify what interventions are working well and what interventions need to change. Additionally, they need to ensure that all planning is fully evaluated to inform next steps.

Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

- Most children are improving their outcomes as a result of attending The Den. They are making very positive progress in improving their skills, for example, in regulation and resilience. Children feel safe and are confident in approaching staff when they require help, support, or care. The majority of children develop well their independence skills which is helping them increasingly care for themselves. All children have a full-time educational programme at school. There are no recorded instances of exclusion. Parents share that they feel their child is supported effectively and has formed positive relationships with staff.
- Most children have an appropriate Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) that provides staff with a comprehensive overview of their strengths and needs. As a next step, senior

leaders and teachers need to ensure that all children have an appropriate IEP in place. In doing so they should make sure targets focus on outcomes, are measurable, and clearly show how skills will be taught. They should ensure that all IEPs are reviewed and evaluated frequently and that they identify and evidence clearly the progress children are making.

- All children have reasonable adaptations made for them to access education, including intimate care arrangements. However, senior leaders need to improve approaches to meeting expectations of the Getting it right for every child practice model. For example, they need to ensure children and parents have regular meetings to develop comprehensive plans and involve parents more in decision making about their child. They should establish fully the use of chronologies to help them see patterns, spot concerns early, and plan effective interventions.
- Teachers plan effectively time for children to participate in learning in mainstream classes, where appropriate. This supports the majority of children to experience success participating in learning with a wider group of peers. They do this through carefully considering which curriculum areas children will experience most success in. Children access learning with peers in, for example, music, physical education, library visits and the school's 'OTTER club'. Once per week a class from the school join children in The Den to learn how to sign. This is helping children normalise alternative approaches to communication and they communicate with peers when able to do so. As a result, the majority of children experience high levels of inclusion within the life of the school.

Raising attainment and achievement

- Taking account of individual learner profiles, overall, most children make good progress in literacy, as appropriate to their CfE level. Children make the strongest progress in accelerating their communication. They are developing well their skills to read and write and enjoy listening to texts.
- Children make appropriate progress in numeracy, including sorting shapes, identifying and continuing patterns and the four basic operations, as appropriate to their level. There are children who would benefit from support to accelerate their progress further in numeracy across a broader range of organisers.
- Most children make appropriate progress towards achieving their personal targets. Senior leaders and staff should refine and improve the methods used to monitor children's development over time to ensure they secure the best possible outcomes.
- The overall average attendance in the provision is above national averages for the sector. However, there are too many recorded instances of latecoming amongst children. Senior leaders and staff, with support from the local authority, should continue to work with families to reduce barriers that are causing children's latecoming. This includes ensuring that children placed by the local authority at the enhanced provision have equitable access to support that helps them arrive at school on time.
- Most children are increasing their confidence in interacting with others and taking responsibility in class. For example, during science activities children cooperate well and use resources properly. During other activities, children are showing improvements in waiting for their turn or when seeking attention from an adult. Children are proud of their work in class and enjoy sharing this with familiar staff. Where appropriate, children take lead roles within the

school, for example being class or school librarian or teaching other children signs and gestures. This allows them to demonstrate their skills in less predictable contexts.

- Senior leaders and staff maintain a robust understanding of children's additional support needs. They ensure that children do not miss out on school activities as a result of their additional support needs. Where children show an interest in joining peers in larger school activities, staff support them well to participate. This is helping children develop a sense of achievement. They access learning that supports the development of attainment in curriculum areas, such as, music, physical education and art. Children enjoy accessing and learning about their communities beyond the school. Staff are sensitive to children's intimate care needs and ensure that children are treated with dignity and respect across the school day.
- Children would benefit from interventions to reduce inequity of access to supports that would improve their wellbeing. For example, in recent years, children have experienced a reduction in opportunities to access therapeutic supports. Senior leaders, based on evaluation and evidence, should now consider how to utilise PEF for children in The Den.

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.