

Summarised inspection findings

Auchencairn Primary School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

26 August 2025

Key contextual information

Auchencairn Primary is a small, rural school near Castle Douglas. Children are taught in two mixed-aged, multi-composite classes. At the time of inspection, there were 27 children on the school roll. The headteacher has been in post for almost two years. She is also the headteacher of another small, rural school.

All children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zone six.

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

- Auchencairn Primary School is a nurturing and caring place for children to learn. The health and wellbeing of children underpins the life and work of the school. This results in a safe, positive and engaging learning environment for all children. Relationships between children and staff are very positive. This is an important strength of the school. As a result, all children are well supported and enjoy learning together in the close, family atmosphere.
- Since her appointment, the headteacher has led a successful process to revisit and review the school's vision, values and aims. This involved staff, children, parents and the wide range of community partners. Together, the school community reflected on the uniqueness of the school, its strengths and areas for further improvement. This has ensured that the future direction of the school is meaningful and relevant for everyone. The school vision is for children to be 'brave', in their learning, in standing up for what is right, and in learning about the world around them and beyond. The school values, 'ready, respectful and kind', are very well understood by all. As a result, children have a positive, 'can do' attitude to their learning. They are well behaved and polite.
- Due to the multi-stage composite nature of classes, teachers plan together to differentiate lessons and activities, ensuring learning is well matched overall to the individual needs of children. Teachers' planning allows for flexible groupings to provide additional support for individual children, as and when required. During lessons, children have an appropriate balance of well-planned opportunities to work individually and in groups. Class teachers and support staff work together very effectively. Highly skilled learning assistants play an important role to allow flexibility in learning across the differing stages within the classes. This helps to ensure learning is accessible and meaningful for all children, include those who need extra support.
- The headteacher has involved staff and children in the introduction of a learning and teaching policy. This is helping teachers to share effective practice across the school. Children have helped to design a 'recipe' for a good lesson. As a result, almost all children understand the relevance and purpose of their learning and can link this meaningfully to their prior learning.

Increasingly, children are involved in co-constructing steps to success along with their teachers. They have regular opportunities to self- and peer-assess their work. Children help to plan aspects of their learning, by creating interesting questions about what they would like to find out about in their topic work. They are given opportunities to personalise and have choice in their learning, for example, in selecting a country to research and write a report on. Children respond well to these features of learning and produce creative and individual ideas.

- Children enjoy selecting examples of their best work to share in class, and to showcase at assemblies and on wall displays. With guidance from teachers, children set personal targets for literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. These targets, along with helpful, regular verbal and written feedback from teachers, provides children with clear direction on how to improve as learners. Children are becoming aware of the important skills they are developing as learners, and as active members of their school community. As planned, staff should continue to develop children's awareness of meta-skills and the importance of these for learning, life and the world of work.
- Staff make effective use of the attractive school grounds and local community partnerships to provide children with exciting contexts to learn across the curriculum. Very well planned and relevant activities result in all children being motivated and engaged in their learning. For example, they demonstrate imagination as they work with members of the local historical society to create items for a time capsule. The popular village Highland Games is a joint venture, planned by the children and Community Council members. Children also work with local residents to maintain the attractive community garden. These valuable, long-standing partnerships with local community groups greatly enhance children's experiences. This is helping them to develop a strong sense of community leadership and environmental stewardship. These partnerships also provide children with opportunities to develop an understanding of different careers and future pathways. The headteacher is keen to continue to develop outdoor learning as a strong feature of the school's curriculum rationale.
- Children make good use of digital technology to support their learning. They use tablets confidently to take photographs and to produce animations to capture their learning. Older children use laptops independently to learn coding, to research information and to word process their stories.
- Staff have made a sound start to learning about and implementing play pedagogy, particularly for younger children. They should continue to develop their understanding of provocations, spaces and interactions that encourage children of all ages to demonstrate and apply high order thinking skills.
- All children, parents and staff contribute to the school's improvement work. Teachers regularly share ideas from their professional learning and apply this in planning for learning, teaching and assessment. The outward-looking headteacher and staff make the most of opportunities to share good practice with other local schools, with whom they have developed close working partnerships. Staff engage in relevant professional learning and moderation activities that focus on developing aspects of learning, teaching and assessment. This is helping staff to maintain confidence around national standards for achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) levels, particularly in literacy and numeracy. As planned, the next step is for staff to develop a stronger understanding of standards in all curriculum areas.
- Staff use standardised assessments to check on children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Staff use this data, in addition to a range of formative and summative assessment information, to inform their professional judgements, and to challenge high-achieving children appropriately.

The headteacher has implemented a useful, strategic approach to tracking and monitoring attainment. This provides the headteacher and staff with an overview of how well all children are progressing as they move through the school. As a result, teachers pinpoint accurately where children require additional challenge or support. This is helping to ensure that all children can make the best possible progress in literacy and numeracy. As a next step, staff should extend this successful assessment, monitoring and tracking approach for all areas of the curriculum.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very 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

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Due to the very small numbers of children at each stage of the school, attainment and progress is expressed in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels.
- Overall, the robust data presented by the school demonstrates that almost all children are achieving appropriate CfE levels in literacy and numeracy, relative to their age and stage. Across the school, a minority of children exceed national expectations. Children with additional barriers to learning are attaining well, appropriate to their individual levels of need.

Literacy and English

- Overall, attainment in literacy is very good. Most children are making very good progress in all areas of literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children speak confidently and articulately. As a result of effective relationships across the school, almost all children are confident in sharing their news and ideas with all age groups. Older children benefit from taking part in class debates. Younger children are learning about the features of good listening and being a quality audience.

Reading

- As a result of the school's Reading for Life initiative, most children enjoy reading and make personal choices about what they read. Children benefit from the class library areas and have access to a range of reading materials. Almost all children state their preferences for authors and explain their reasons. Younger children are making good progress developing their skills in phonics to decode new and tricky words they encounter. Across the school, children understand the differences between fiction and non-fiction texts. They use a range of sources independently to research topics and read for information.

Writing

- Children write for a variety of purposes, including linked to their topic work and for real life events. Individualised writing targets ensure that almost all children use appropriate punctuation and structure in their writing. Children are gaining in confidence in their use of word processing to enhance their writing. Older children are learning the skills of notetaking and planning their writing. Older children name techniques that writers use to engage readers, such as metaphors and similes. Older children would benefit from more opportunities to write extended pieces, including redrafting their work.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, attainment in numeracy is very good, with most children making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children make exceptional progress.

Number, money and measure

- Children apply their numeracy skills across their learning. Practical, real-life experiences such as growing potatoes are used to reinforce learning about time, length and height. Younger children estimate and then check length using non-standard and standard units. Children accurately calculate the perimeter and area of shapes. By linking learning activities to relevant themes, children remain motivated and engaged in their learning. As a result of reinforcing numeracy across learning, children see the relevance its link to skills for learning, life and work. They talk about when and where they use numeracy in real-life, such as planning and budgeting for the school trip.

Shape, position and movement

- Children identify and classify a range of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They identify compass points and give directions accurately. Older children describe the properties of a range of angles.

Information handling

- Younger children use their knowledge of colour, shape and size to match and sort items in a variety of ways through play. Almost all children describe how to organise data collection, using tally marks, bar graphs and charts to present information. Older children discuss and use the language of probability and chance to predict outcomes such as fifty-fifty, likely and unlikely.

Attainment over time

- Teachers gather a range of data to track children's progress in learning and wellbeing over time. Almost all children are making very good progress over time in both literacy and numeracy. Teachers use a range of formal, informal and standardised assessments to inform their professional judgements about children's progress. Engagement in moderation activities with cluster schools maintains staff confidence in assessing children's progress in literacy and numeracy. The next step, as planned, is for staff to track children's progress over time more fully across the curriculum.
- Children's attendance, overall, continues to be above national averages. The headteacher and staff monitor attendance carefully, following local authority policies and procedures. There have been no exclusions in recent years. There are no children on part-time timetables.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- There is an impressive range of ways for children to develop the four capacities of CfE across the school. Staff ensure that all children have the chance to participate in the life and work of the school through various leadership roles, focus groups, committees and through the house system. Staff offer clubs at lunch time, as well as after school clubs, so that all children can take part in out-of-class activities.
- Staff know children individually very well. They track and celebrate their achievements, including children's personal interests and talents out with school. Children participate and regularly do very well in local competitions. Their recent successes include in an inter-school floor curling competition, Rotary Club quiz and speech making events, and in the annual

Burns' poetry competition. Children in P6 and P7 complete Bikeability training with a local cycling company.

- Children are beginning to identify the meta-skills they are developing in their learning. There is scope to develop this further to ensure that children are building on the skills they gain from their many wider achievements and participation in the life of the school and beyond.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic background of all children and provide appropriate interventions to address individual children's needs. In the main, this is to address issues associated with children's participation due to rurality. In partnership with parents, the headteacher and staff ensure well-considered use of the allocation from the Pupil Equity Fund. Staff's targeted interventions are supporting and promoting equity of access and equal opportunities for wider, out of class achievements, for all children.
- Staff ensure that the cost of the school day is not a barrier for children's participation. All children receive a school T-shirt for physical education lessons. As they grow out of these, they receive a new one, and the spares go into the school's pre-loved uniform bank. All children new to school receive a school sweatshirt. These inclusive, welcoming and helpful approaches are supported admirably by the strong Parent Council. Parents also fundraise to subsidise the cost of school trips for families.

Additional information

- Children receive their entitlement to two hours of physical education each week.
- Children learn French from P1 to P7. As part of future curriculum developments, older children should also benefit from learning another language, in line with the national policy, Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quality 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.