

Summarised inspection findings

John Fergus School

Fife Council

9 September 2025

Key contextual information

John Fergus School is a non-denominational, all-through school, situated in Glenrothes, Fife. The school serves children and young people from age 4 to 18 years from across Glenrothes and the surrounding villages. All children and young people have significant complex additional support needs. There are 23 learners across four classes. The headteacher has been in post for 14 years. She is supported by 5.5 full time equivalent teachers, a team of pupil support assistants and a full-time pupil support nurse. All children and young people receive free school meals. The school has undergone significant staffing issues due to long term absences over the last 18 months. This has resulted in short term supply cover with new and inexperienced staff joining the team in that time.

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

- The headteacher and staff work very well together to create a positive and welcoming learning environment. Staff build nurturing and respectful relationships with learners and the wider school community. Families and partners are extremely supportive of the work of the school and parents feel confident that their children are safe and well-looked after. As a result of the positive relationships and nurturing environment, learners look forward to coming to school and they enjoy learning. All staff ensure that children and young people experience learning which builds their independence and resilience in unfamiliar situations.
- All staff demonstrate their commitment to children's rights clearly through their words and positive interactions. This is reflected in the signs and displays focusing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which are prominent throughout the school.
- Almost all staff adopt a nurturing approach and provide well-organised and predictable structures and routines for the school day. Teachers and staff work very well together to identify learners' needs and seek appropriate support from external agencies. As a result, most children and young people behave very well. A few learners present challenging behaviour, which staff manage well in order to minimise disruption to other learners. Challenging behaviour can be as a result of communication difficulties and developmental delays, which may lead to frustration or dysregulation. The headteacher works well with other agencies including paediatric health services, psychiatrists, psychologist and the pupil support nurse to identify possible route causes for behaviour patterns. The headteacher puts effective plans in place to mitigate risks and ensures that all learners and staff are treated with care, dignity and respect.
- The headteacher has worked effectively with staff to produce a learning and teaching guide. The school values of confidence, happiness, respect, motivation and safety and security are reflected well in this document. It sets out effective expectations about what learning and

teaching should look like within lessons and on any excursions. Teachers follow this well in most lessons and engage children and young people in relevant, appropriately challenging tasks, which build upon their interests and strengths. The school has a clear policy to ensure that learners experience predictable routines and prompt transitions between activities. This supports learners to understand what to expect during the school day and ensures that almost all learners are not bored or agitated. In a few instances, staff need to attend to children and young people with immediate support or care needs. Most teachers manage these situations well. Teachers should continue to work together and to support each other and share good practice across the school.

- Most lessons are motivating, and children and young people engage in well. Lessons are almost always appropriately challenging, enjoyable and based on learners' interests and needs. Staff use a range of visual, sensory and physical assessment resources to encourage children and young people to assess their own learning and that of their peers. Most teachers provide appropriate feedback on learning and sensitively take the time to allow learners to process learning, repeat learning and practise new skills. The headteacher and staff should continue to work together to develop consistency across learning and teaching to ensure lessons offer all children and young people appropriate levels of challenge.
- Teachers and personal support assistants provide valuable lessons for learners on how to use signs, pictorial symbols and alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) aids. This is supporting learners to express their preferences, make decisions and engage in more meaningful communication. Teachers share successful communication methods with parents and families. Families explain that this approach is making a very positive impact on children and young people's lives at home and in the community. It is supporting learners to consolidate new skills at home. Teachers should continue to increase children and young people's use of digital AAC devices where appropriate, in order to build important digital communication skills.
- Teachers take time to understand learners' views and work with parents as partners to ensure that they support and advocate for learners in their care. Families appreciate how the headteacher seeks, values and acts upon their views. Staff routinely ask parents to contribute towards setting children and young people's targets. For example, a group of parents identified that children needed to build confidence and tolerance around certain medical procedures. Staff worked well over time with identified learners to build their resilience in these situations by 'practising' in the school environment. This is helping children and young people to access medical care more comfortably and is reducing their anxieties.
- Staff compile Pupil Learning Profiles (PLPs) which include learners' targets in literacy, numeracy and maths, health and wellbeing and skills for learning, life and work. Most PLPs outline well the supports which learners require and give a clear overview of children and young people's levels of engagement. Learners also have an assessment profile which outlines their sensory needs, communication preferences, personal strategies and risk assessments. Together, these documents provide staff with a comprehensive overview of learners' needs and their developmental progress. As a result, staff meet most learners' needs very well and successfully identify areas where they need more support or further challenge. Staff should continue to work together to achieve consistently high standards and the right levels of challenge for all children and young people across the school.
- Staff make good use of spaces in the school well and the local community to provide stimulating learning experiences, with ample opportunity for learner-led play. There are well-equipped outdoor areas for children and young people to choose activities during lessons and during play times. Staff have worked well with partners to build and maintain a high-quality sensory garden. Learners spend free time appreciating the sounds, textures and sensory stimuli of the plants and physical structures. Staff work effectively with learners in the outdoor

spaces to support the development of their motor skills, coordination, balance, and to increase their wellbeing.

- Teachers use the pre-early and foundation milestones and the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes to plan learning. They use local authority planning and progression tools and the national Benchmarks to support their assessment of learning. The headteacher is working with staff and local authority partners to review how teachers plan learning and assessment. This should result in staff identifying better any gaps in learners' progress and should allow teachers to pinpoint better areas of strength in individual learner profiles. This will further improve how well staff can build on children and young people's prior learning. Staff should continue to work together and with colleagues from similar schools to share best practice in planning and assessment. This should ensure that they gain the best possible understanding of learners' strengths and areas for further support.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

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

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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

- All children and young people require significant additional support in their learning. Taking account of children's individual additional support needs, overall children and young people's attainment in literacy and numeracy is very good. The majority of children are working at early level in listening and talking, writing and numeracy. A minority of children are working at early level in reading. A minority of children are working at foundation milestone level in literacy and numeracy. A few children are working at first level in literacy and numeracy. A few children are working at second level in reading.
- Staff's focus on developing children's communication skills supports children and young people very effectively to develop their abilities to communicate. As a result, almost all children across the school are making very good progress in their communication skills. Children and young people at all stages respond well to a range of sensory resources, such as objects of reference. They use their preferred methods of communication very effectively to answer questions or express their opinion. Where appropriate, children use AAC aids to share pre-recorded messages and participate in communication exchanges. All children use a range of symbols, vocalisations or words as appropriate to communicate with others. A few, more able, children and young people answer questions or discuss their ideas clearly using words. Teachers should continue to improve children and young people's abilities to communicate by developing further children and young people's use of digital technologies or signing.
- Most children choose books or texts of interest to them. They enjoy listening when staff read stories to them. A few children read texts at an appropriate level. Most children identify characters from a story. They indicate whether they have enjoyed a story using their preferred method of communication. All children are developing their abilities well to mark make or write. Most children match simple words to pictures. A few children order the letters of the alphabet correctly and form simple sentences using a small number of words. A few children, where appropriate, would benefit from increased opportunities to develop their mark making and writing skills further.
- All children and young people develop their numeracy skills well in a range of real-life contexts. For example, when shopping in the local community. A minority estimate the weight of items when comparing which is heavier when cooking. Most identify familiar numbers from a scale. A few children count to 100, including counting in tens. A few children add two-digit numbers to within 100. A few children describe place value in numbers within 100. Most children follow simple patterns. Most children understand direction when turning left or right. Most children would benefit from increased opportunities, where appropriate, to develop their skills in identifying and naming two dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects.

- The headteacher tracks children and young people's attendance very effectively. All staff work closely with families and partners to ensure any issues affecting children or young people's attendance are addressed promptly. This supports almost all children and young people to attend school regularly.

Attainment over time

- In the broad general education phase (BGE), teachers track and monitor children's progress over time effectively in literacy and numeracy. They track and monitor children's progress against their individual targets captured in their personal learning plans. Teachers capture and analyse valuable information on children's progress in other curricular areas using the school's inter-disciplinary tracker. Collectively, the range of information gathered supports teachers to evaluate children's progress accurately over time. Overall, in the BGE, almost all children attain very well. Teachers should develop further their approaches to checking children's progress to ensure all children attain as best they can. This should include considering how they capture the progress of those children whose learning takes small steps.
- Since 2022, all young people in the senior phase have attained a very good range of unit awards. All young people attain across all curricular areas at national level 1 or 2. The number and level of these awards varies each year dependent on the abilities of young people in the senior phase. Teachers are very clearly focussed on ensuring every young person attains as best they can. This results in young people attaining very well as they progress through the senior phase.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children and young people develop a wide range of highly valuable skills through opportunities within the school campus and wider community. Each class has responsibility for taking care of an area within the school garden. This helps children and young people very effectively to develop their sense of responsibility. Visits to local shops supports young people to develop their understanding of exchange and to make decisions about what products they need to purchase. Visits to local cafes, churches and library support children and young people very well to develop their confidence in visiting new and unfamiliar places. These visits help them to practise and improve their communication skills in a range of different settings. This helps children and young people to plan to be more independent in preparation for when they leave school. For a few children and young people, visits within the local community help them to develop their abilities to cope with potential distractions. This enables them to focus on, and engage meaningfully in, the purpose of the visit. Children and young people are very proud when staff recognise and give awards for their achievements.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have a very good understanding of each child or young person's additional support needs and socio-economic background. They ensure that cost is not a barrier to any child or young person accessing activities. The headteacher provides valuable support to families to help them consider and prepare for their child's life beyond John Fergus School. For example, at an early stage, the headteacher encourages parents to explore post-school placement options. She sets up information sessions to inform parents of any legal or financial implications they may face as the legal guardian of their children. This helps families prepare for their future in good time and with as much support as possible.
- Senior leaders used pupil equity funding (PEF) effectively to create the post of intensive support worker (ISW). The ISW supports other members of staff to act as link workers for their own class. The ISW team work very closely with children and young people's families to provide a range of universal and targeted supports. They provide 1:1 targeted interventions for

children or young people who may be experiencing difficulties. For example, staff support families to access funding for equipment or clothing, and they facilitate a number of groups to provide practical and social support for learners' families. These interventions support children and young people to overcome barriers to their learning and increase their access to education.

- The ISWs support the parent group which helps parents to connect and share their experiences in raising their child. Parents help each other by sharing ideas on how to access further support for their child. The 'guys group' enables male parents to connect in ways helpful to them, where they can share their experiences. Feedback from parents in both the parent group and guys group is very positive. These groups are very effective in bringing parents together and helping them improve their children's outcomes.
- Senior leaders need to develop further how they gather and analyse evidenced of the impact of PEF in improving children and young people's outcomes.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Staff identified that male parents did not engage with the school as well as female parents. The ISWs worked with male parents to explore whether the school could do more to help them engage with the school better. This resulted in male parents setting up the 'guys group'. The group meets regularly at times and in places, which suits male parents better. As a result, a few male parents meet regularly. They share their experiences of raising their child, including sharing ideas of what helped them to support their child better. There is very positive feedback about from families about the support they receive from this group. A few parents of children who have now left the school attend the meetings. Their experiences help current parents understand their journey and what to expect as their child ages. Parents of former children support current parents by sharing suggestions of how to access additional support for their child.

Explanation of terms of quantity

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

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

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