

Summarised inspection findings

Carstairs Primary School

South Lanarkshire Council

8 September 2026

Key contextual information

Carstairs Primary School is a non-denominational school situated in the village of Carstairs in South Lanarkshire. At the time of inspection, the school had a roll of 95 children organised across five multi-stage classes. The headteacher has been in post for 12 years and is supported by one class-committed principal teacher.

Approximately 29% of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 and 2, with 28% of children registered for free school meals. Across the school, 44% of children are recorded as having an additional support need. There are no children for whom English is an additional language.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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 highly regarded headteacher, supported well by the principal teacher and staff team create a strong sense of community and care in Carstairs Primary School. This is underpinned effectively by the school motto “Be Safe, Be Happy, Be All You Can Be”. Almost all children feel supported, safe and respected. All children are polite and demonstrate kindness and care towards their peers. All staff know children as individuals and a strong rights-based culture has been established. As a result, there are high expectations and high standards of behaviour across the school. All staff use nurturing approaches and support children effectively to enable them to engage positively in all aspects of school life.
- Children benefit from a modern, stimulating learning environment across classrooms and shared learning spaces. All teachers use the local natural environment including the local woods, effectively to take learning outdoors. The creative use of these spaces supports children’s motivation and engagement in their learning. Children share their learning through high quality displays which help them reflect on their learning. Almost all learning experiences are engaging, with children working effectively independently, in pairs and in groups. Almost all children collaborate respectfully and value the views of others. Approaches such as “Our Voice Matters” and the consistent use of classroom charters ensure children’s views are routinely sought and acted upon.
- Staff have developed a ‘Learning, Teaching and Assessment’ framework which supports a consistent understanding of expectations of learning and teaching approaches across the school. This is underpinned by the school’s curriculum rationale and ‘Rainbow Wall’, reflecting the shared aspirations of the school community for all children.

- Teachers are at the early stages of developing children's understanding of meta-skills. A few emerging approaches are beginning to support children to recognise and apply skills such as collaboration, creativity and resilience across their learning.
- All teachers ask children what they already know and what they want to learn next when planning learning across the curriculum. For example through topics such as the Commonwealth Games and World War II, they include opportunities for children to choose areas of interest to explore further. This strengthens personalisation and increases children's choice.
- In almost all lessons, tasks are well matched to children's needs and abilities. The pace of learning supports children to engage very well. In all lessons the purpose of learning is shared and children are supported to understand their steps to being successful. In almost all lessons, teachers support children to make links to prior learning and apply their knowledge and skills across the curriculum. As planned, children should become increasingly involved in co-constructing, with teachers, their steps to success. This should strengthen further their ownership of and engagement in learning.
- In almost all lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to check children's understanding. In the most effective lessons, higher-order questioning extends children's thinking and supports them to explain, justify and apply their learning.
- All teachers use a range of formative assessment approaches, including oral and written feedback well to support children's learning. In the majority of lessons, feedback is clearly linked to children's steps to success and helps children understand how to improve their learning. Most children engage in peer and self-assessment. However, children are not yet confident in understanding their individual targets. Teachers should provide more specific, targeted feedback to help children understand their next steps more clearly.
- Children's learning experiences are enhanced using digital technology across the school very well. Almost all children use a range of high-quality digital tools effectively to support and extend their learning. Children routinely use a variety of programmes and software flexibly to meet their needs. Staff have a clear focus on promoting online safety. A few children use assistive technologies well to support independent learning. Across the school, digital approaches, including the use of programmable toys and technologies, support creativity, problem-solving and skills development. The school's recent national coding award reflects the positive impact of this work.
- Children at early level experience regular, high-quality opportunities to learn through play. Staff respond well to and extend children's learning through a well-considered balance of child-led, adult-led and adult-initiated learning. All children demonstrate sustained engagement and independence as they apply a range of skills in different play contexts. Staff adapt the learning environments and their interactions appropriately to support and extend children's thinking. Staff should now consider how to develop and extend learning based on their observations and evaluations of play.
- Teachers across P3–7 provide increasing opportunities for children to learn through play. The introduction of the 'Play Station' enhances children's creativity and exploration across a range

of topics and science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) contexts. Almost all children engage very well during play and demonstrate confidence in working independently and collaboratively.

- All teachers plan effectively across all curricular areas using both local authority and collaboratively developed school frameworks to support coherent short, medium and long-term planning. This ensures that children build on what they already know and make appropriate progress through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. Senior leaders and staff use a structured assessment calendar for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing to monitor children's progress, identify any gaps and target support effectively. The headteacher meets with teachers termly to discuss planning and next steps for children. At the end of the academic session the headteacher collates plans from across the school. These are discussed with staff to ensure continuity in learning experiences for children as they move stages.
- Support staff work very effectively in partnership with class teachers to enhance learning experiences for children. They provide strong, consistent support for children's wellbeing and deliver targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy for children who require additional support in their learning. As a result, these children engage more confidently in their learning, making clear progress and developing key skills.
- All teachers participate well in moderation activities within the school and across the cluster. This supports teachers' professional dialogue and increasing consistency in their understanding of national Benchmarks. As a result, staff are making more robust and reliable judgements about children's progress in literacy and numeracy.
- The headteacher has robust systems in place to track and monitor children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. She meets regularly with teachers to review evidence and address any barriers to learning. Teachers use assessments appropriately to identify gaps in learning for individuals or groups, and plan relevant next steps accordingly.

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.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is very good. Almost all children working towards early and second level are on track to achieve national expectations in literacy and numeracy in June 2026. Most children working towards first level are on track to achieve national expectations in literacy and almost all are on track to achieve numeracy in June 2026. A few children are achieving beyond expected levels.
- All children requiring additional support are making very good progress towards their individual targets in learning.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and English across the school.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children are confident and articulate their thoughts and opinions very well. Almost all children at early level listen carefully to the ideas of others. They follow and give instructions to each other accurately, for example, during a co-operative task or game. Most children at first level listen and respond to others in a respectful way and use eye contact and expression. Children at second level apply verbal and non-verbal techniques in discussion and interactions, for example, eye contact, body language and tone. Across first and second level children should continue to develop their ability to ask higher-order questions and build on others' ideas to deepen dialogue.

Reading

- At early level children ask and answer questions very successfully about the characters they are reading about. They re-tell stories and use the ideas to create their own. They are well placed for further challenge through opportunities to explain their thinking about characters and events, beyond re-telling, to develop early comprehension skills. At first and second level, most children talk confidently about their favourite authors, sharing their opinions on the books they enjoy. Children at first level should work on justifying their reading preferences with reasons and evidence from texts to strengthen depth of response and understanding. At second level, children can compare novels and digital texts, explaining the

benefits and limitations of each. All children benefit from a class and shared library space which is well resourced with a range of fiction and non-fiction texts.

Writing

- Children at early level benefit from a range of opportunities to write across different contexts and through play. Almost all children attempt to spell familiar words correctly and are using capital letters and full stops, demonstrating a good awareness of the tools for writing. At first level children are developing their persuasive writing skills benefiting from meaningful contexts which are enhanced using digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Children are making links across literacy by creating texts about racism linked to their whole school focus on inclusion and equality. At second level children use punctuation effectively and share how they use similes and adjectives to up-level their writing. They talk confidently about their writing in different genres. Children across the school are writing through relevant, meaningful and real-life contexts to produce high quality recounts, newspaper reports, imaginative and descriptive pieces as well as developing their knowledge about poetry.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children make very good progress from prior levels of attainment in numeracy and mathematics across the school.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, almost all children count confidently to 10 and beyond using practical materials and match numbers to objects. They apply counting skills naturally in play and everyday routines. At first level, almost all children are able to accurately round numbers to the nearest 100 and beyond. They read, write and order whole numbers up to 1,000 and add and subtract three digit numbers with accuracy. Children at first level would benefit from revisiting their multiplication tables, linking this to division skills. Almost all children at second level demonstrate confidence and fluency in number, rapidly recalling multiplication facts. They apply their understanding of fractions, decimals and percentages to solve problems, clearly explaining their chosen methods.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, almost all children continue simple patterns involving objects, shapes and numbers. Almost all children at first level demonstrate a secure understanding of a range of angles including right, acute, obtuse and straight. At second level children use appropriate mathematical language to describe the properties of a wide range of two-dimensional shapes (2D) and three-dimensional objects (3D). They apply accurate vocabulary to explain relationships between shapes, including their properties and nets, demonstrating secure understanding. Teachers should continue to take learning outdoors to allow children to apply their practical skills in position and movement in unfamiliar contexts.

Information handling

- Almost all children at early level use tally marks accurately to gather data. They are beginning to display information correctly in simple charts. At first level, almost all children use information to create different types of graphs and talk confidently about the information displayed. At second level children gather, analyse and present information appropriately. They use pie charts, bar graphs and line-graphs appropriately to share their findings to

different audiences. Across the school, children would benefit from applying information-handling skills in a range of real-life contexts. This should challenge their practical understanding and application of their information handling skills.

Attainment over time

- Attendance across the school is currently 95.2% which is above the national average. The headteacher, supported by the wider staff team tracks attendance and late coming very effectively. Children's absence is mostly due to term time family holidays. The headteacher monitors attendance in line with local authority guidance and works closely with families who may require support. She implements a sensitive and bespoke approach with children whose attendance drops below 90% focusing on the particular needs of each child. Parents welcome this approach and feel well supported to increase their children's attendance. As a result, improved attendance, and timekeeping is supporting better engagement in learning and increasing attainment.
- Attainment in literacy and numeracy has remained consistently strong over time. The headteacher has a robust and strategic approach to tracking and monitoring children's attainment. She supports staff very well to use data effectively to identify children at risk of not achieving expected attainment levels and plans appropriate support. A clear focus on improving attainment in literacy and numeracy, supported by high-quality staff professional learning, has strengthened both universal and targeted approaches for children. As a result, almost all children who were identified as needing support are making improved progress. Staff recognise that these children will continue to require on-going support with their learning.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- The headteacher promotes a strong culture of recognising children's wider achievement. All staff share a clear understanding of success across learning, achievement and personal development. The school celebrates children's achievements regularly through assemblies. Initiatives such as 'Star of the Week' recognise children who demonstrate the school values and 'Magnificent Me' recognises success beyond school. Parents engage in celebrating children's achievements very well and attend showcases and performances. As a result, children are motivated to achieve, recognise their progress and build their confidence well over time.
- Staff track participation across a wide range of achievements and analyse engagement to identify gaps and barriers. They provide targeted lunchtime and after-school clubs, reducing the risk of individuals missing out. As a result, the majority of children participate regularly in creative and sports clubs, residential visits, and events such as the Clydesdale Dance Festival. Children also engage positively in local community events. These experiences build confidence and support children to contribute as responsible, active citizens.
- All Primary 7 children take on leadership roles as buddies for Primary 1. They also participate in "world of work" experiences across the school. They take pride in supporting younger children and contributing to school life. Children across the school lead initiatives, including lunchtime clubs, which build responsibility and leadership skills. Overall, learners are motivated and active participants in school and community life.

Equity for all learners

- All staff know children and their families very well. Together they work proactively to ensure that the cost of the school day does not limit access to learning or wider experiences. The school takes effective steps to reduce any financial barriers for families. This includes offering pre-loved uniform, fancy-dress costumes and Christmas jumpers. The Parent Council, supported by the wider parent body actively support this work. This includes raising funds to enable all children to participate in trips and excursions.
- The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to improve children's attainment and reduce the poverty-related attainment gap. Senior leaders align PEF spending clearly to school improvement priorities. This supports both high-quality universal and targeted interventions for children. Most PEF is appropriately allocated to additional staffing, support resources and participatory budgeting with children. Children's learning, confidence and achievements are positively impacted as a result of this. The headteacher works effectively with staff and parents to evaluate regularly the impact of interventions and identify clear next steps. Senior leaders monitor progress effectively in narrowing both the attainment gap and addressing wider barriers to learning. There is clear evidence of improving outcomes for targeted groups of children, including their accelerated progress and a reduction in gaps between groups of children.

Other relevant evidence

- Children experience two hours of high-quality physical education each week.
- Senior leaders ensure all staff implement a consistent and progressive approach across the school in learning French and Spanish from P1 to P7. There is a termly focus on each language.
- Children learn about Christianity and other world religions through their religious and moral education programme and topic work. This supports them to value and explore diversity, and respect other cultures.
- All children benefit from a class and shared library space which is well resourced with a range of fiction and non-fiction texts. They also have access to a range of digital texts. Children across the school have been focusing on inclusion, racism, discrimination and what it means to be a good citizen. A range of inviting books about inclusion and equality are available for children to enjoy and share in school and at home.
- The headteacher and staff hold regular 'Carstairs Connects' events. These sessions allow families to connect with the school team and listen to approaches to learning that children experience in the classroom. They support parents to understand how they can best support children at home with developing lifelong skills. There is also a strong focus on families working with their children within the sessions. The latest focus on literacy has provided opportunities for teachers to host workshops about the foundations of literacy, lifelong literacy skills, why writing matters and the tools for writing. In the upper stages families have been involved with learning about adaptable activities and games that can be used at home to support learning and further understanding. This approach is supporting parental engagement very well across the school.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with education and/or the catering service.

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.