

Summarised inspection findings

St John's Primary School (Blackwood)

South Lanarkshire Council

18 August 2026

Key contextual information

St John’s Primary School is a denominational school in the village of Blackwood, South Lanarkshire. At the time of inspection, the school had a roll of 65 children organised across three multi-composite classes. The headteacher has been in post since January 2026. She is supported by an acting principal teacher. In September 2024, the majority of children resided in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 5 and above, 25 % of children in P6–7 were registered for free school meals, 32% of children had an additional support need and 11% of children had English as an additional language.

1.3 Leadership of change	good
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 refreshed vision of ‘creating a caring community of faith, enabling learners to reach their full potential’, Gospel values and the school values are actively promoted and shared within the school community. Stakeholders across the community were involved in the creation of the refreshed vision and values in 2024/25. As a result, these are widely understood and supported by children, parents, staff and partners. The strapline and visual of a ‘small school, big heart’ encapsulates the warm welcoming ethos.
- In the short time she has been in post, the headteacher has very quickly established trusting, supportive and productive relationships with children, staff, parents and partners. She provides effective leadership underpinned by her encouraging and supportive approach. She is building effectively on the caring and collaborative culture that exists within the school. This is encouraging all staff to be reflective in their practice to improve outcomes for children. The headteacher takes effective account of risk when managing the pace of change. For example, she recognises that the lack of a permanent headteacher over the past two years has impacted on the pace of change. She has begun to carefully review the impact of school improvement planning in improving outcomes for children. She has introduced small steps of change. This includes a stronger focus on use of data and an increased emphasis on the most effective measures of success. This will help to support staff to identify what priorities and interventions could be further developed and embedded and which are less effective.
- Staff embrace a collective responsibility for improving outcomes for children and helped to provide stability and continuity for children and their families during a period of change. They take an active role in leading improvement across curricular areas such as play, enquiry-based learning and numeracy through an effective model of distributed leadership. They have engaged purposefully in a range of professional development to support

improvement in children's learning. This includes developing approaches to improve children's writing and numeracy and mathematics. They share their learning with colleagues across the school. Pupil support assistants lead well targeted approaches to support children's learning and wellbeing. They help children improve their social interactions, engagement in learning and sense of wellbeing. As a next step, the headteacher should support staff to measure further the effectiveness of professional learning and its impact on their practice and outcomes for children.

- The current school improvement plan (SIP) sets out clear priorities which reflect local and national initiatives. These include developing approaches, for example, to further improve children's writing skills and a focus on diversity. The headteacher rightly recognises that there is a need to be more explicit in the SIP about how staff monitor the ways progress towards the delivery of outcomes is measured. This should also provide staff with clearer information about the impact of interventions on outcomes for children's learning.
- The headteacher and staff recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and have a helpful quality assurance calendar. This outlines the activities the headteacher and staff undertake to evaluate the quality of the work of the school. The headteacher is at the early stages of refining quality assurance activities to increase rigour and sharpen how success will be measured. The first activity she is leading is to review the consistency and quality of the feedback children receive on their work across the curriculum, a priority in the SIP. These actions should help promote further effective self-evaluation to support continuous improvement.
- The headteacher holds helpful termly discussions with teachers regarding children's attainment, progress and achievement. The focus currently is on whether children are making expected progress within a level. The headteacher should now support staff further in using the newly introduced data processes such as 'class on a page'. This should provide a sharper focus on determining next steps for children, so that all children maximise their progress, including those who require additional support.
- Most children and parents believe the school listens to their views. Children are consulted on aspects of school improvement through the 'Collective Options to Grow our School' groups. There are child and parent-friendly versions of the SIP which support understanding about school improvement priorities. There is scope to consult children and parents more systematically on school improvement, including contributing to self-evaluation and identification of priorities.
- Pupil Equity Funds (PEF) have been allocated to professional learning and additional resources to provide support for children with gaps in their learning. There are currently no poverty-related attainment gaps. As planned, the headteacher and staff should involve parents and children more fully in determining how PEF is spent.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff work very effectively with children to ensure that they are engaged and supported in all areas of their learning. Children are very friendly and polite to staff, each other and visitors. Overall, the standard of behaviour is very high in all areas of the school, playground and community.
- Almost all staff have developed interesting and engaging environments within each class which support ongoing learning. Staff present and celebrate examples of children's learning through the use of attractive and well-designed displays. Children work well in groups, pairs and individuals. They support one another effectively and collaborate well in their learning. For example, children across mixed stages worked together to plan and organise a successful and well-attended 'Scottish café' for the school community.
- A rationale for learning, teaching and assessment has been created which details expectations of learning across each level. The headteacher has correctly identified the need to evaluate and review the effectiveness of this guidance. Staff should now work together to agree common approaches to high quality learning and teaching, for example by illustrating the features of a high-quality lesson at St Johns Primary.
- Teachers provide a range of learning activities and resources that meet the needs of children increasingly well. In most lessons, teachers set tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. Teachers should continue to ensure that children benefit from increased challenge. A few children are ready for more complex activities and increased opportunities to apply their learning across a range of contexts.
- All staff work effectively together to collaborate and plan interesting and engaging learning experiences for children. For example, all staff share skills and knowledge across a few curriculum areas through 'teacher trade' sessions. As a result, children across the school benefit from a range of learning experiences across areas of the curriculum. Pupil support staff assist children well during lessons and when working with small groups and individuals. They work very effectively with teachers to plan and deliver interventions in literacy and numeracy that support children's ongoing progress.
- Children have access to a range of resources to support them in their learning including digital technology. Almost all children across the school experience high-quality digital learning. For example, older children use applications to support them in illustrating stories and creating

information posters and digital animations. Younger children use digital matrix codes to access online stories and programmable toys to learn about algorithms.

- Staff in the early years are developing well their approaches to play pedagogy using national practice guidance. They have created considered and organised play areas with a range of resources to learn through play. Younger children across the early stages demonstrate sustained focus and attention during play. For example, children use their problem-solving skills to create large models of landmarks. Staff should now build on these experiences, ensuring older children experience challenge and depth in their learning through play. Staff should continue to develop play areas to increase opportunities for challenge and application of skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Most teachers outline the purpose of learning clearly and offer clear and helpful explanations. A majority of teachers support children to identify and discuss the skills that they are developing. In most lessons, teachers create and share measures of success. Teachers' explanations of how to be successful in learning are frequently overly focused on the task to be completed rather than on the learning contained within the task. The headteacher should support staff to deepen their understanding and use of the steps to success for children to continue to progress in their learning. This will support all children to develop a clearer understanding of how they learn and what they need to do to improve.
- Almost all teachers use questioning well to check for understanding and to recall prior knowledge. A minority of teachers use effective questioning to extend children's learning to encourage children to think more deeply. Staff should continue to develop a wider range of questioning for different purposes to support children's development of higher order thinking skills across all stages. Most staff use formative assessment strategies appropriately/to support children's understanding of learning and next steps. Most teachers give written feedback in literacy and numeracy. They now need to support children to understand and use this feedback more effectively in their learning.
- Teachers gather a range of evidence of learning in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. They use a helpful assessment calendar across the year agreed by the learning community. Teachers now need to demonstrate more clearly how they use assessment information to provide further challenge for children. This should help to support all children to make the best possible progress.
- Teachers plan over different time scales, using the experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and national Benchmarks. Staff work collaboratively to plan focus weeks such as wellbeing week and world of work week. This is supporting children to understand how their skills and knowledge will help them now and in the future. The headteacher should now support staff to strengthen approaches to planning activities that link learning across the curriculum, ensuring that planning provides sufficient depth and detail.
- Teachers moderate with colleagues in school. They would benefit from increased opportunities to moderate with colleagues in other schools using all aspects of the moderation cycle. This will support teachers' understanding of moderation. Senior leaders should continue to support teachers to develop confidence in making more accurate judgements of children's progress in literacy and numeracy especially where children are exceeding national expectations. This

should help to embed a deep and shared understanding of national standards and ensure that children make the best possible progress.

- Teachers use tracking and monitoring to record and track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing over the school year. Teachers meet with the headteacher termly to discuss children's progress and achievement. They identify children who would benefit from additional support and plan targeted interventions. Staff share detailed information about children's progress at times of transition. This supports continuity in children's learning. Staff should now begin to track children's progress in other areas of the curriculum.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff use flexible progressive learning pathways, which take account of the experiences and outcomes of CfE in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and Religious Education in Catholic schools (RERC). This helps children, including those who require additional support with their learning, build effectively on prior learning in these areas.
- Children experience learning in all other curriculum areas in a range of ways, based on the experiences and outcomes of these areas. For example, children experience music, art, and food technology through 'teacher trade' sessions, where children benefit from the specialist interests and skills of staff. Technology is delivered discretely. Children learn Spanish and some Scots at certain points in the year. They are not yet receiving their entitlement to 1+2, a language learning approach.
- Teachers make very effective use of school grounds, the community garden and natural spaces within the wider community to deliver outdoor learning. These experiences provide children with meaningful opportunities to apply their skills in relevant, real-life contexts and reflect the school's important place in the local community. Outdoor learning is carefully planned under headings such as learning how to explore and play in the outdoors, responsibility for the outdoors and taking learning outdoors. Partners such as the Glasgow Science Centre engage children in outdoor learning very effectively through the 'Clyde in the Classroom' programme.
- Staff are developing innovative and creative approaches through enquiry-based learning to deliver learning which links across different areas of the curriculum. Staff respond to children's ideas when agreeing key questions and themes for exploration and plan a range of interesting and engaging activities. This is helping children to lead their learning and make links across different curricular areas. Older children support younger children to participate in this learning through a range of creative activities. The next step is to focus on developing further approaches which enable children to experience breadth and depth consistently across the relevant curriculum areas. This should enable children to understand in a more structured and progressive way their progress in acquiring skills and knowledge and how the skills and knowledge link to, and build on, prior learning.
- Children receive their entitlement to two hours high-quality physical education (PE) each week and make use of indoor and outside facilities. Teachers, active schools coordinators, and a few children in the role of wellbeing ambassadors also support children very well to develop their physical activity, PE skills, confidence and teamwork through clubs and sporting events.
- There is a positive culture of reading across the school and staff and children recommend favourite books to one another. Children develop a love of reading through enjoying books in the well-stocked school libraries. Staff encourage children to read regularly for enjoyment at home, as well as in school through a well organised lending programme.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Almost all parents express confidence in the school's work and feel comfortable approaching staff. They appreciate the care and support staff provide for their children. They describe the school as a well-established and valued part of the local community. Parents report that staff treat children fairly and with respect, which helps build positive relationships between home and school. Parents have regular opportunities to visit the school and discuss their child's learning. This includes parents' evenings, home-school diaries and flexible arrangements by teachers that allow parents to speak, ask questions, or raise concerns.
- Parents value the regular communication shared by the headteacher and staff through emails and newsletters. Most parents believe they receive clear information to help them better understand how their children's learning is assessed and how well their children are progressing.
- The Parent Council supports the school well with fundraising through local grants. The Parent Council organises summer and Christmas fairs with the local parish, family nights and Halloween and summer discos. Funds they raise are used for various events and developing the garden.

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

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

- There is a welcoming and inclusive ethos reflected in all aspects of school life. The headteacher and staff have a clear focus on supporting and improving children's wellbeing. All staff model effectively the shared school values of kindness, respect, faith, gratitude, courage and determination. They demonstrate kindness and nurture in their interactions with children and build relationships that enable all children to feel supported and known. Staff know children very well and support children's wellbeing effectively. They intervene sensitively and provide support in a range of ways, for example for children who require a calm start to the day to help them to be ready to learn.
- Relationships across the school are very positive. Children are proud of their school and have a strong sense of belonging to their school community. Almost all parents believe staff promote children's emotional wellbeing well and provide children with the support they need to be confident individuals. Children are extremely well behaved and display kindness and consideration to adults and each other. They are friendly and polite.
- Children talk confidently about the importance of healthy eating and exercise in supporting their wellbeing. They understand well what it means to be active and healthy. Almost all children feel staff help them to engage successfully in a range of physical activities supported by parents, community groups and sports partners. For example, children participate in sports clubs and cycling sessions regularly.
- Almost all children feel safe in school and they participate in learning activities which help them understand how to stay safe. For example, children are knowledgeable about road safety and online safety. The headteacher investigates and records bullying incidents and takes steps to mitigate these. Staff raise children's awareness of bullying through anti-bullying focus weeks, parent and child-friendly information sheets for families and at assemblies. Almost all children and parents feel the school deals effectively with bullying.
- Children complete self-evaluation of their wellbeing once a term. Staff use this information well to support individual children and to inform planning of specific interventions such as 'drawing and talking'. Most children feel they have an adult at school they can speak to if they are worried or upset about something. Children can discuss individual aspects of their own wellbeing but do not yet understand in a structured way how all aspects of their lives are interdependent. As a result, they are not yet able to fully evaluate and articulate their wellbeing needs. Staff should continue to embed the language of all aspects of wellbeing. This will help children understand more fully the importance and relevance of the wellbeing indicators and thus better placed to support their own wellbeing.

- Staff have taken part in professional learning on attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches. This supports staff very well in their shared approach to meeting the needs of individual children. Staff consider carefully the school environment and have established a well-used calm space for children, the Wellbeing Room. This is utilised effectively to support learners to self-regulate and return to lessons calmer and more ready to engage. Pupil support staff also provide valuable support when working with individuals to deliver targeted interventions that support children's social and emotional well-being. As a result, almost all children are calm and ready to engage in learning.
- All staff understand their statutory duties in how they protect children and meet children's needs. Staff have a strong understanding of the range of children's needs within their classes. All parents feel that their child receives the help that they need to do well. Staff have created specific plans for children who require additional support with their learning. The headteacher should now ensure staff evaluate systematically the impact of planned interventions to ensure they contain more detailed measures of success and lead to improved outcomes for children. The headteacher should also ensure that the views of parents and children are captured within the process of planning and evaluating all additional support plans. This will help to strengthen children's and families' ownership of interventions designed to improve their wellbeing and learning.
- Children develop their knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity during assemblies and in a few areas of the curriculum such as RERC. They are developing an understanding of their rights through their focus on the United Nations Charter for the Rights of the Child by a focus on rights in class charters and at assemblies. Teachers use these class charters to support positive relationships and behaviour. Staff should now develop a strategic overview of how children learn about their rights, equalities, diversity and protected characteristics across the whole curriculum. They should ensure that children's learning in these areas is progressive and coherent. This will help children fully understand their rights and develop further their skills and understanding when dealing with discrimination and intolerance. Staff have taken initial steps in this important work by introducing books and resources that promote diversity. The headteacher's regular update is helpfully written in several languages to reflect those spoken within the school community.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Due to small numbers on the school roll and the risk of identifying individual children, attainment and progress are expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups and levels.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and numeracy from prior levels of attainment. A few older children make very good progress. Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress from their prior stages of learning.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English. In listening and talking, children are making very good progress. A few older children make very good progress.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children listen carefully to staff and each other. Children are very articulate. They communicate clearly and confidently when sharing their answers, views and opinions during group and class discussions. Younger children recognise and generate rhyming words, and hear the sounds made by a combination of letters. Older children build respectfully on the contributions of others and ask questions to clarify their understanding. They respond well to a range of questions, including inferential questions to demonstrate their understanding.

Reading

- Younger children use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read simple words. They recognise and recall some key words using sight vocabulary. They talk about their favourite stories and characters. They should continue to explore stories and books to become familiar with terminology such as 'title' and 'author'. Older children explain successfully the difference between fact and opinion. Most older children read with fluency, understanding and expression. They scan text well to find information and answer accurately a range of questions, including inferential and evaluative questions. Children now need to explore texts with increasingly complex ideas and structures.

Writing

- Younger children are using their knowledge of letters and sounds to make independent attempts at early writing. Younger children use a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence successfully. As they move through the school, children develop sentence structure well, including effective openers and descriptive writing. Children across the school are motivated

and enjoy writing for a range of purposes. Most older children have a sound understanding of inference and can use their skills to work out unfamiliar words in context. Children across the school should be supported to have an increased focus on presentation and handwriting.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few older children make very good progress.

Number, money and measure

- Most younger children confidently count forwards to 20. They add and subtract within 10. They are less confident identifying coins up to £2. Almost all children round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They use their mental agility skills well to solve two step word problems though are less confident in describing and explaining different strategies. Almost all older children have a strong understanding of place value. They apply this knowledge when working with larger numbers and to effectively solve calculations in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They understand and effectively use the links between fractions, decimals and percentages. They describe and explain a range of strategies to solve multi step problems. They record times accurately using the 24-hour clock.

Shape, position and movement

- Most younger children identify simple two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) objects. Children at the middle stages identify and describe the properties of 2D shape and 3D objects. They identify right angles and use their knowledge of position and movement to describe position on a compass when using half turns and quarter turns. Almost all older children describe and explain the properties of a range of 2D shapes and 3D objects using a range of accurate mathematical vocabulary. They identify and calculate the diameter and radius of a circle. Children name, measure and successfully classify a range of angles. They should continue to build and apply their skills in different contexts and through problem-solving.

Information handling

- Most younger children interpret information from simple pictographs. Children will benefit from regular opportunities to revisit knowledge and understanding of information handling. Most older children identify a range of graphs and diagrams successfully. They interpret information in graphs and diagrams and describe different ways to gather and display data. Moving forward they should build their experience in using digital devices to present data in a variety of ways.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher regularly monitors attendance and early action is taken to prevent non-attendance becoming a barrier to learning, in line with local authority procedures. Most children's attendance is high, and overall attendance is in line with the national average. The size of the school means that staff take a bespoke approach to any absences from school and know the reasons behind each absence, for example, illness, family holiday or a need for a sensitive approach to individual circumstances.
- Most children make good progress as they move through the school. School staff track individual children's progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing across the year. The headteacher and staff monitor and discuss attainment at regular planning, tracking and assessment meetings. The headteacher has recently introduced an overview which tracks and

records children progress and attainment over their time in school. Staff should continue to develop this to ensure a range of data is captured, including national standardised assessments and wellbeing assessments. The headteacher uses data effectively to consider children's progress where families may face socio-economic or other challenges. The headteacher should now support staff to ensure that data reflects children's progress when children exceed national expectations.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff work effectively with partners to provide a range of opportunities for achievement for children across the school both during and after the school day. Staff work in partnership with the local church to support children through the sacraments and to contribute to the local community through the 'Mini Vinnie' group. As a result, children contribute effectively to their faith community. Older children develop personal skills and leadership through buddying younger children. The headteacher is currently developing approaches to monitoring children's achievements in and out of school in order to identify where children may be missing out on opportunities.
- Staff celebrate children's achievements through weekly assemblies, newsletters, the school website and celebratory displays. Older children develop their leadership skills as they take on roles such as library monitors, house captains and wellbeing ambassadors. These opportunities are developing children's skills of communication and leadership. Children are at the early stages of identifying and discussing the skills they are developing through their learning and wider achievements. Staff should now provide more opportunities for children to learn about and discuss these skills in class and during assemblies. The headteacher has recently introduced a new tracking tool which is designed to support staff to identify and track the skills children are developing. This should help them to identify and target any gaps in skills development for individuals or groups of children.
- As a next step, staff should now support children to more clearly articulate their learning and progress in these areas. Staff should also consider how they can extend these leadership opportunities to younger children.

Equity for all learners

- All staff know children and families very well. They know the socio-economic circumstances of children and any barriers to learning and participation. They have considered the cost of the school day and offer support with items such as uniform, school materials and trips. A free breakfast club is offered on a daily basis at no cost to families. The headteacher effectively works with the Parent Partnership Group to subsidise the cost of the P7 residential trip and other excursions. Staff work closely with families to offer discreet support where required.
- Pupil Equity Funds (PEF) are used to support interventions through purchase of digital resources for literacy and numeracy interventions, play resources, standardised assessments and subsidising the P7 residential experience. Staff work with the parent partnership group and children to agree how PEF monies will be spent. The headteacher should continue to strengthen approaches to gathering data to evidence the impact of PEF on improving outcomes for children who may be disadvantaged by socio-economic circumstances.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- Teachers make very effective use of the school grounds, the community garden and natural spaces within the wider community to deliver outdoor learning. These experiences provide children with meaningful opportunities to apply their skills in relevant, real-life contexts and reflect the school's important place in the local community. For example, children at the middle stages explore and investigate the natural environment to build their understanding of pond creatures, classification and food chains. Older children have meaningfully contributed to the development of the community garden through working in partnership with local groups. Younger children learn how to use knots to join materials together and create dens as well as planting flowers and vegetables. Outdoor learning is carefully planned under headings such as learning how to explore and play in the outdoors, responsibility for the outdoors and taking learning outdoors. Partners such as the Glasgow Science Centre engage children in outdoor learning very effectively through the 'Clyde in the Classroom' programme.

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.