

Summarised inspection findings

Strathconon Primary School

The Highland Council

30 June 2026

Key contextual information

Strathconon Primary School is a non-denominational school in the remote and rural location of Muir of Ord in Highland Council.

The current acting headteacher took up post before the inspection in May 2026. He is also the acting headteacher of two other schools which, along with Strathconon Primary, form a tri-cluster partnership. Prior to the current acting headteacher starting, there was another acting headteacher for two and a half days per week for the tri-cluster from January 2026 to April 2026. There is one full-time class teacher and one support staff member.

The current school roll is five children working in one multi-stage composite class. There has been significant changes to the school roll over the last year.

All children live in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zone 4.

1.3 Leadership of change	satisfactory
This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are: ■ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community ■ strategic planning for continuous improvement ■ implementing improvement and change	
■ Strathconon Primary is a warm and welcoming school located in a remote and rural location. Children and families have a strong sense of belonging to the school which plays a central role in the local community. Staff work effectively as a committed team to sustain the school vision of creating a vibrant and inclusive culture where everyone is supported to do their best. The acting headteacher has recently taken up post. He has focused, rightly, on building positive relationships with staff, children and parents to gain an understanding of the school context and community. He has made a strong start to working effectively with staff, children and parents to support school improvement. Over the last six months, substantive staff have provided stability to the school community. ■ The school values were created a few years ago in consultation with all stakeholders. Staff refreshed these values with children at the start of the school session. Children demonstrate the values well in their interactions with each other and adults. They enjoy receiving ‘Golden Box’ awards when they demonstrate them. Children are less confident in discussing the values. In the last two years, staff and children within the school have received a national award for work to promote and uphold children’s rights. The acting headteacher identifies rightly the need to further deepen children’s understanding of the school values and their rights to ensure they are meaningful. This is especially relevant given the significant changes to the school roll over the last year.	

- Staff willingly undertake leadership roles to improve outcomes for children. They feel empowered and confident to use their individual skills to build leadership capacity within the school and tri-cluster. For example, staff led successfully on the development of effective outdoor learning approaches. This provides children with valuable experiences to develop skills for learning, life and work that are relevant to their community.
- Children have a few worthwhile opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills. Children demonstrated their leadership skills well within the wider community by preparing for a Christmas party and making mince pies with the Parent Council. They also organised an outdoor learning event for other children in the tri-cluster. As outlined in the school improvement plan (SIP), staff should provide children with further leadership opportunities through active participation in citizenship groups.
- Staff undertake regular self-evaluation activities throughout the school year. They use How Good is Our School? (4th Edition) to identify school strengths and areas for improvement. They also regularly gather the views of parents and children through surveys. The majority of children feel that the school takes their views into account when making changes and all feel comfortable approaching staff with suggestions. Children should now be more fully involved in self-evaluation to help them have a more active role in school improvement planning. Staff's use of How good is OUR school with children should support this work moving forward.
- Staff work very well with parents and partners in the community. The Parent Council and wider parent body take an active role in enhancing children's experiences. Staff work effectively with local partners such as the Community Hall Council and Strathconon Estate to provide children with worthwhile learning experiences. Partners in the local taxi service provide transport to help children access trips which they would not otherwise be able to have, given the remote location of the school. Parents and partners speak highly of the positive relationships they have with school staff, who they respect and trust.
- Staff work in strong partnership with colleagues in the tri-cluster. There is a full calendar of collegiate activities which provides staff with regular opportunities to work together. Staff value this time to meet with colleagues and share what's working well. Staff pro-actively seek professional learning opportunities reflecting their commitment to shared educational values and standards. For example, last session, staff participated in professional learning to introduce a new writing resource as part of school improvement planning. This work is impacting positively on children's attainment in writing. More recently, staff have worked to improve approaches to reading. They have created a bank of resources and have implemented teaching strategies in the classroom to promote children's engagement. Senior leaders and staff need to measure the impact of this work on children's attainment. It will be important for staff to consider what robust assessment evidence they will gather to demonstrate children's progress and attainment.
- There is a detailed quality assurance calendar in place. Over the course of this school session, a range of quality assurance activities have been carried out by senior leaders. This includes observations of learning, planning meetings, tracking discussions and reviewing children's work and attainment. The acting headteacher is reviewing this quality assurance evidence carefully. He is beginning to develop an understanding of strengths and areas for improvement within learning, teaching and assessment. He recognises it would be helpful for staff to review

approaches to making effective use of assessment information. This should help staff to gather and analyse assessment evidence which informs clearly children's next steps in learning.

- This session, SIP priorities include raising attainment in reading, improving approaches to planning, tracking and monitoring, and promoting children's rights to support health and wellbeing. The pace and strategic direction of school improvement work have been affected by changes in leadership. Positively, school staff work effectively to progress implementation of SIP priorities. Moving forward, senior leaders need to support staff strategically with school improvement planning and implementation. This will help to ensure that planned actions on the SIP meet intended outcomes and raise attainment and achievement.
- All staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic context of the school community. Staff use pupil equity funding (PEF) to support children to overcome barriers to learning through the purchase of resources. School staff discuss the use of PEF with the Parent Council. Senior leaders should continue to encourage parents to contribute their views when considering the use of PEF.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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 have created a calm, nurturing and inclusive school ethos. Children are polite, respectful and well behaved. Children's previous work on the school values of 'Teamwork, Kindness, Friendship and Creativity' and children's rights support effectively positive relationships. Children have created a class charter linked to children's rights to continue the development of their knowledge in this area. All children feel the school helps them to understand and respect other people.
- Children benefit from learning in a recently renovated school building. Staff have created a bright and organised environment for children to learn in. Children's work is shared and celebrated on wall displays which builds their confidence. Children have access to an attractive playground area that includes playground markings which they use regularly to support their learning. Staff use this space to provide children with opportunities to take their learning outdoors. For example, children use the outdoor environment to develop their skills in measuring length.
- Children work well individually and together during group tasks and activities. They support each well other in their learning. Staff encourage children to follow their own interests and provide them with choice, where possible, in their learning. This is supporting children to develop as independent learners. They should continue to provide children with purposeful learning experiences which enable children to lead their own learning.
- Staff have been involved in developing expectations of high-quality learning and teaching with colleagues in the tri-cluster. In most lessons, staff share the purpose of learning with children and recap prior learning with them to support their understanding. Children would benefit from more frequent opportunities to discuss how they could be successful in their learning. In most lessons, staff provide children with appropriate explanations and instructions which are well understood. Staff use a range of open and closed questions to support children's thinking and make appropriate, well-timed interventions during lessons.
- Children receive encouraging and supportive oral feedback during all lessons. Children are beginning to receive helpful written feedback on extended writing pieces, identifying their strengths and next steps. Staff should embed and extend this positive practice to work in other curricular areas. Children are at the early stages of developing their skills in assessing their own work to set criteria. They set termly targets in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing but need more support to discuss their successes and next steps. Children would benefit from more

effective use of formative assessment approaches including opportunities to use self- and peer-assessment strategies. This should help children to understand their progress and to set relevant personal targets.

- Staff use an interactive whiteboard to enhance teaching and to engage effectively children in their learning. All children have an individual digital device that they independently access to support their learning across the curriculum. This includes devices to help children overcome barriers to learning, if required. Children use these devices to access web-based learning, make presentations and carry out research. They recently used software successfully to create video clips. These experiences help children to develop effective digital literacy skills. Staff should continue to develop and embed the use of digital technology to help children learn independently.
- Staff are at the very early stages of developing play pedagogy to support younger children's learning. Senior leaders and staff should engage with local and national practice guidance to inform their skills in implementing play-based approaches. This should help to build children's deeper engagement and motivation in learning.
- Staff have developed strong approaches to outdoor learning which help children have a firm understanding of nature and their local environment. Staff have developed their expertise in woodland learning which helps to enhance children's learning outdoors. Staff have established effective partnerships with their local community partners. For example, children are developing their gardening skills by caring for planters donated by the Parent Council. Children visit the local estate regularly to use a well-designed outdoor classroom to participate in a range of well-considered lessons. This helps children effectively to develop a range of skills such as creativity, communication and problem-solving in different contexts.
- Staff use an assessment calendar that sets out when children should undertake core assessments in literacy and numeracy. They plan a range of assessments as an integral part of the planning of teaching. This includes summative and standardised assessments to inform professional judgements on children's progress. Staff have developed assessments that link across different curriculum areas to enable children to show their learning in a wider context. Senior leaders and staff should review their approaches to make more effective use of the assessment evidence they gather. The acting headteacher has rightly identified that further use of formative assessment is an area for development. This should support staff's professional judgements about children's progress as they move through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.
- Staff value the opportunity to work with colleagues from other schools to moderate achievement of a level in writing. This is helping them to develop their understanding of national standards in writing. Senior leaders should provide staff with further opportunities to moderate other curricular areas beyond writing. Further engagement with the national Benchmarks will support staff to review assessment evidence carefully and make more robust professional judgements about children's progress.
- Staff plan learning for children across all curricular areas over different timescales. Children are involved in planning for contexts that link across curriculum areas. They share what they already know and what they would like to learn as a starting point for learning. Staff plan work

for individuals and small groups at different levels of difficulty to take account of a multi-stage composite. Staff support children effectively when they find their work difficult and all children know how to get help if they need it. Children engage best when they experience learning set at the appropriate level of difficulty. Senior leaders and staff now need to use assessment information better to ensure that all children experience learning which is planned at an appropriate level for them. This should help to ensure that children make the best possible progress.

- Staff track children's progress linked to CfE experiences and outcomes and national Benchmarks. They use a local authority tracking format to record children's progress for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders and staff meet four times each session to discuss children's progress. During these tracking meetings, staff should analyse carefully the full body of assessment information. Staff are developing their understanding of using data more effectively within the cluster tracker. Going forward, staff would benefit from having clear support and guidance on the recording of children's attainment within the tracker. This should help staff to have a clearer understanding of children's progress and inform future planning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff use local authority progression pathways to plan children's learning experiences for all areas of the curriculum. Staff plan learning that links across curriculum areas for expressive arts, science, social studies, technologies and religious and moral education. They use a CfE experiences and outcomes tracker to ensure breadth of coverage for these curriculum areas over a three-year period.
- All children benefit from a range of engaging opportunities that enhance their learning across the curriculum. Children visited the local estate to enhance a topic on their local community. They enjoyed a workshop delivered by Glasgow Science Centre to support their learning on the human body. Children also enjoyed a trip to the Newton Rooms to learn about engineering. These opportunities support children well to learn in different contexts.
- Children benefit from participating in a range of activities with children from the tri-cluster schools. Staff have recently focused on themes such as resilience. These activities support children well to make friends beyond their immediate community and to build resilience.
- All children across the school learn French as part of the modern languages 1+2 approach. This is not yet taught using a progressive framework. Children would benefit from learning French set at different levels of ability to suit their age and stage. All children experience a second additional language through participation in a Gaelic language and culture programme.
- Children across the school receive regular religious education. They learn about Christianity and other world religions. There is not yet a whole school structured planning process to support the delivery of religious education. A link with a local church supports children to participate in religious observance across the year.
- All children receive their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education each week based on a local authority progression pathway. They learn an important life skill by attending a block of swimming lessons.
- Children have access to a well-stocked class library that contains a wide range of books. Staff need to support children to develop a positive reading culture across the school. Children listen to stories regularly but require more opportunities to participate in initiatives that promote reading. The development of links with partners such as the local library will provide children with more opportunities to engage in reading for pleasure.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents feel very welcome in Strathconon Primary School and staff encourage parental engagement as often as possible. Parents highlight the strong sense of belonging to the school community. They feel comfortable approaching school staff with a concern and are confident that this will be addressed.
- Parents value the communication which they receive about their child's learning through regular newsletters. They particularly appreciate being able to see updates about their children's learning on the school's online digital application. Overall, parents feel that their child receives the help they need to do well. This helps parents to talk to children about their learning and support them at home.
- The active Parent Council, along with the wider parent body, contribute very well to children's learning and experiences. For example, the Parent Council ran a successful Bonfire Night event and Christmas party for the local community. They worked with children to make mince pies and deliver these to the members of the local community. This supports children well to be effective contributors.

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.

3.1 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 very warm and friendly ethos within the school. All staff demonstrate positive and nurturing relationships with children. Overall, children feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect and all agree that their school helps them to understand and respect others. Children know they have someone to talk to at school if they feel upset or worried.
- Children are polite, friendly and well-behaved demonstrating kindness to each other and adults. Staff use restorative approaches, if required, to help children resolve conflict. The school has a positive relationships policy which staff use effectively to promote positive behaviour. They encourage children sensitively during their learning and play to help them focus and concentrate.
- Children demonstrate successfully their understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. For example, children recently wrote a plan about what they would do if an emergency happened at school. Children also recently completed a first aid workshop supported by partnership working with the Strathconon Estate and Nordic First Aid. They know how to treat cuts, grazes and hypothermia. Children demonstrate effectively their skills in risk assessment in the outdoor classroom. They follow safety rules and instructions carefully acting as responsible citizens. These skills and knowledge are highly relevant and meaningful to children given the remote location of the school
- Children have an increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to positive wellbeing. They use the wellbeing indicators to reflect on their wellbeing during the school year. Staff care for children and take appropriate steps to address concerns that children raise during these reflections. Children would benefit from more opportunities to discuss and reflect upon the wellbeing indicators during everyday experiences. For example, when children complete their daily emotional check-ins, it would be helpful for staff to encourage them to use the language of the wellbeing indicators during these discussions. This should help children to talk with more confidence about the factors that contribute to positive wellbeing such as being active, nurtured and included.
- Staff are committed to providing children with a rights-based education. Over the last few years, staff have worked hard to support children's understanding of their rights. Children can discuss a few of their rights, such as the rights to play and rest. They link their understanding of rights to learning, such as their work on the Vikings. Staff should continue to support children's deeper understanding of their rights through assembly and whole school activities.

- Staff are aware that children require support to build resilience. They use mindfulness and growth mindset approaches effectively to help children feel more positive when they find things difficult. Children use these approaches when required. In addition, children recently started using yoga balls to learn some yoga techniques for breathing. These approaches help children to have greater responsibility for their wellbeing.
- Staff implement a well-planned transition programme to help children meet others who will also be moving to secondary school. For example, children participate in a residential trip to meet other children who they will attend secondary school with. This helps children well to cope with change as they move from a very small school to a larger one. Children have regular opportunities to build their social skills and meet other children within the local tri-cluster. Staff plan these cluster days very effectively to support and enhance the health and wellbeing curriculum. For example, children work with their peers from other schools on days themed around friendships and substance misuse.
- Children experience a broad and progressively planned health and wellbeing curriculum. This includes receiving appropriate education around relationships, sexual health and parenthood. Children have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and participated recently in a workshop about internet safety. All children feel that school staff help them to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- Children have appropriate opportunities to develop their physical wellbeing. They feel they have lots of chances to get regular exercise. For example, children participate in training to help them cycle safely. Children talk enthusiastically about the sports day with cluster schools where they participate in different sports. Children also participate in competitions and sporting events such as the County Sports Day, demonstrating their sporting and teamwork skills. They also participate in swimming lessons, supported by equity funding, which help them to develop a valuable life skill and improve their fitness. Staff are keen to re-establish partnership working with Active Schools to further enhance children's physical health and wellbeing
- All staff understand fully and meet their statutory responsibilities in relation to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. Staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, keeping children safe and Getting it Right for every Child (GIRFEC). Staff know children well and identify quickly when children have barriers to learning. They follow local authority guidelines to create child's plans or individualised educational plans when required. They involve parents in the creation of these plans. Children have targets which are specific and measurable and make appropriate progress towards individual targets. Most children have never experienced bullying. The acting headteacher has recently delivered an assembly to children about bullying which is supporting their understanding of this important issue. Staff should continue to support children to understand about concepts of bullying and how to address this.
- Children demonstrate a keen interest and understanding of nature and sustainability. They talk knowledgeably about different plants and animals within the local area. They recycle and compost food waste and are currently undertaking a survey of butterflies within the school grounds. Children have recently received two large planters which have been funded by a local grant secured by the Parent Council. They have filled this with soil mixed with their compost

and are looking forward to planting fruit or vegetables. Children are developing their skills well in growing potatoes and beans, which helps them to understand where food comes from.

- Partners support children's wellbeing and the curriculum very effectively. For example, children recently attended a workshop at Strathconon Estate to learn about deer management and anatomy. This enhanced children's work in social studies about the human body. This also supported children to understand about the world of work and the local economy.
- Children are developing their understanding of diversity. For example, they recently explored what it means to be dyslexic, which helps them to know that people learn in different ways. Children learn about different faiths and religions through the religious and moral education programme. Staff should provide children with regular opportunities to learn about people from different backgrounds and cultures.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Due to the very small number of children, attainment and progress will be expressed in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels. Currently, there are no children in P1, P4 or P7.
- Overall, attainment in both literacy and English and, numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy from their prior levels of attainment. Staff should consider how they ensure all children receive learning that is appropriately challenging to help them make faster progress.
- Over the last two years, staff have implemented approaches to teaching writing which is helping to raise attainment and close gaps in children's learning. This session, they have implemented approaches to raising attainment in reading. Senior leaders should support staff to gather and analyse carefully robust assessment information about reading to help them measure the impact of this approach.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children make satisfactory progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Younger children follow and give simple instructions well. They recount experiences, stories and events in a logical sequence. Younger children would benefit from more experiences of listening to spoken texts of their choice. Older children take turns and contribute at an appropriate time when engaging with others. They identify a few techniques to show presentation skills when engaging with others for example, making eye contact and the use of body language. Older children would benefit from more opportunities to plan and deliver presentations to a wider range of audiences.

Reading

- Younger children say the blends and sounds made by a combination of letters and read aloud familiar texts with attention to punctuation. They contribute to discussions about characters and events relevant to the text. Younger children would benefit from support to develop expression when reading aloud. Most older children read aloud a familiar piece of text and show understanding of what they have read. They are beginning to recognise the difference

between fact and opinion. Older children would benefit from more opportunities to explore non-fiction texts and their key features.

Writing

- Younger children have an increasing ability to create their own imaginative stories. They use their knowledge of phonics and spelling strategies to help spell familiar words correctly. Younger children would benefit from support to use phonics and spelling strategies to spell a greater range of familiar and unfamiliar words accurately. Older children are developing the ability to organise and present instructions in a logical way. They increasingly link sentences using a range of conjunctions. Older children would benefit from increased opportunities to use digital technologies to present their work.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children make satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children use a range of concrete and pictorial materials to support their understanding of number bonds and place value. Older children understand place value well up to 10,000 but require further support to work confidently with larger numbers. All children require regular opportunities to complete number calculations, including multiplication and division calculations as appropriate to their age and stage. This should help them to develop speed and accuracy in using a range of strategies. Children demonstrate well their understanding of money. For example, younger children list coins to make amounts up to £1 correctly. Older children find change accurately from £20. Children are developing well their understanding of units of measure for length. They use instruments of measurement such as rulers and trundle wheels effectively during practical tasks. For example, children measure the distance between the school and the outdoor classroom.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children have a firm understanding of the concept of symmetry and identify two lines of symmetry within a range of shapes. They name and describe two-dimensional shapes accurately. Older children use grid coordinates well in practical tasks to follow a map and locate objects within a grid. They are less confident naming and discussing the properties of three-dimensional objects and require regular revision of their knowledge of shape and angles.

Information handling

- Younger children gather and sort information into charts and use tally charts accurately. Older children know that information is displayed within a range of graphs and pie charts. They use digital technology to create online bar graphs successfully. Children need more regular opportunities to display information in a range of graphs to consolidate their knowledge.

Attainment over time

- Attendance for session 2024/25 was 89.3%. This is below both the local and national average. Senior leaders monitor children's attendance each month following local authority processes to support attendance. Staff contact parents to discuss attendance patterns and provide support when attendance falls below expected levels. Senior leaders should take a more proactive approach to communicating the impact of attendance on children's learning over time. There have been no exclusions in recent years. There are no children currently on a part-time timetable

- The fluctuating school role and small numbers of children mean that it is difficult to clearly demonstrate attainment trends over time. Staff should have a greater focus on the use of the national Benchmarks when making professional judgements on children's progress over time. Staff should have more opportunities to moderate standards of children's attainment. More robust interrogation of assessment evidence will support this work well.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children value the award certificates they receive at school assemblies to mark their achievements. These are shared with parents and carers over an on-line platform. Children are proud of this recognition, and it is developing their feeling of self-worth. Children demonstrate their responsibility well through a range of jobs such as helping in the lunch hall. Children demonstrate their creative skills through performances at events such as Burns' Night. Staff identify that children would benefit from more formal opportunities to contribute to the work of the school through membership of citizen groups. As staff take this forward, they should track the skills which children develop through their wider achievements.
- Children develop well a range of skills to support their mental wellbeing such as mindfulness techniques. These activities support children to develop friendships and build self-confidence. For example, all children know valuable first aid skills. They were proud to receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement.
- All children represent their school in local sports competitions. They compete against children from other schools in a range of events. Children develop their sporting and teamwork skills and build resilience through competing in these events.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a strong understanding of the barriers to learning that children may face. This session staff have used PEF to provide transport to swimming lessons and purchased resources to help children overcome barriers to learning. This ensures that children access learning and activities that would otherwise not be available to them.
- Staff implement strategies to support the cost of the school day with the support of the Parent Council. Children and their families have access to a school uniform bank, and older children are provided with equipment to take part in cycling lessons.

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.