

Summarised inspection findings

Symington Primary School

South Ayrshire Council

17 February 2026

Key contextual information

Symington Primary School is a non-denominational primary school situated in the rural area of Symington in South Ayrshire. At the time of inspection, the school had a roll of 174 children organised across seven classes. The school also has a nursery class. Thirty-six children are enrolled in the nursery class. The headteacher has been in post for 17 years and is supported by one depute headteacher.

The majority of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 2 and 4. Approximately 4% of children are registered for free school meals. Across the school, a third of children are recorded as requiring additional support with their learning. A few children have English as 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 headteacher, depute headteacher and wider staff team create a warm, welcoming and inclusive school ethos. All staff have high aspirations and expectations for the children. They ensure all children feel valued, included and actively involved in school life. Staff encourage positive, nurturing relationships which underpin learning, reflect the school's values, the 'Six Symington Standards', and a strong commitment to children's rights. Children follow these standards daily, promoting responsibility and empathy. The school's identity as 'The Pride' strengthens belonging and celebrates shared values: Positive, Rights Respecting, Inclusive, Determined to Succeed, Excellent. Children take pride in this community, which promotes equity and inspires everyone to achieve their best. As a result, almost all children feel safe, respected and ready to learn.
- Senior leaders champion children's rights through weekly assemblies, and staff reinforce these principles within class charters. In addition, children deepen their understanding of rights during dedicated 'Team Time' sessions. Working collaboratively in mixed age 'house groups', children explore how rights are realised in everyday school life. These experiences promote respect for diversity, strengthen teamwork, and encourage shared responsibility. As a result, children develop a secure understanding of their rights as they progress through the school.

- Staff create learning environments across the school which are highly effective in supporting engagement and wellbeing. They ensure resources are easily accessible, and calm colour schemes contribute to a nurturing atmosphere. Staff create displays which are of a very good standard, combining helpful learning aids with children's work to celebrate achievement. In addition, staff provide dedicated spaces, including a sensory area, to support children who require time to regulate their emotions before re-engaging in learning. These approaches are working very effectively, ensuring that all children feel valued, supported and ready to learn.
- Across the school, almost all teachers use a range of teaching approaches and contexts very well to sustain engagement. Teachers ensure most lessons are well-paced, differentiated, and well-matched to the children's needs. A few lessons include opportunities for independent and collaborative learning. Almost all teachers adapt their environment, teaching strategies and resources to better support learners within the classroom environment. They use scaffolding, flexible grouping, and targeted support very well to meet diverse needs. These approaches work successfully, and almost all children show high levels of engagement, remain motivated, and view themselves as successful learners. A few children would benefit from tasks that provide greater challenge, enabling them to apply their skills and extend their learning further.
- Teachers have worked well together to improve the teaching and learning of reading across the school. The consistent and explicit teaching of reading strategies is having a positive impact on outcomes for children. Teachers support children well to confidently engage with increasingly challenging texts and apply their skills with growing independence. As a result, across the school, almost all children demonstrate strong reading skills for their age and stage of development.
- Almost all teachers make the purpose of learning clear and explain how children can be successful throughout lessons. This is helping children understand what they are learning and why. Most teachers are at the early stages of involving learners in co-creating success criteria with a stronger focus on the skills children develop through their learning.
- In almost all lessons teachers use questioning very well to check understanding. Most teachers are beginning to encourage children to think more deeply in lessons using higher order thinking skills, such as analysing, evaluating, and problem-solving, to make learning more meaningful. These approaches are helping children better understand the reasons behind what they learn and why, making learning more relevant.
- Most staff use oral and written feedback well to support children's learning. In a few lessons feedback is used effectively to support children to identify their next steps. The quality of feedback, however, is variable across the school. Senior leaders and teachers should now build on good practice, ensuring more consistent approaches to feedback. Staff should ensure feedback is linked clearly to next steps in learning and helps children understand themselves better as learners.
- Support staff collaborate effectively with class teachers to strengthen learning experiences within the classroom. They assist in delivering focused interventions in literacy, numeracy, and support the health and wellbeing for individual children. These targeted approaches enable

children to make clear progress, build confidence in their learning, and develop essential skills for success.

- Children who require additional support in their learning are very well supported to make progress. Teachers and support staff provide high quality interventions that improve outcomes for children. A few children who are working on their own pathway have individual learning plans. Senior leaders and staff should review these plans more regularly to fully capture progress made.
- Almost all children regularly take part in peer and self-assessment activities to reflect on their learning. This promotes a deeper understanding of their own progress and enhances their ability to identify specific next steps.
- The school has recently introduced a new personalised approach to target setting, with younger children using digital devices to access and discuss their targets, while older pupils can clearly articulate what they are working towards. As planned, this process should now be reviewed to ensure targets remain relevant and achievable, supporting focus and progression in learning.
- All teachers use interactive boards well to support and enhance learning. All children have access to programmable toys to develop early coding skills. These resources help children develop practical and relevant technology skills. Across the school children would benefit from more opportunities to develop digital literacy skills across the curriculum to support and enhance learning.
- Staff provide children at early level with regular opportunities to learn through play, with provocations effectively supporting literacy, numeracy, and science. This approach fosters curiosity, creativity, and sustained engagement as children apply skills across varied contexts. Staff should now track children's progress through play to enable staff to better help children consolidate skills, promote confident application of skills in different situations, and build independence. As play continues to develop across early level and begins to develop at first level, practice should maintain a balanced mix of child-led, adult-led, and adult-initiated experiences.
- All teachers plan effectively using local authority frameworks for short, medium and long-term planning, ensuring progression through Curriculum for excellence levels. Senior leaders and staff use a well-structured annual assessment calendar for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing to track progress, identify gaps and implement targeted interventions. This embedded approach should now be extended across all curriculum areas.
- Teachers engage well in moderation activities within the school and cluster, strengthening professional dialogue and consistency in applying national Benchmarks.
- Senior leaders have robust systems for monitoring and tracking progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, meeting termly with teachers to review evidence and address barriers. Moving forward, they should broaden monitoring and tracking across all curriculum areas to ensure best possible progress for all learners.

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, young people. 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

- Almost all children achieve appropriate Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in numeracy and mathematics. Most children achieve appropriate CfE levels in literacy. A few children are exceeding expected CfE levels.
- Most children who face barriers to learning are making good progress from prior levels of attainment. A few children are making very good progress.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Across the school, almost all children are making very good progress in reading and most in writing. Across all levels almost all children are making good progress in talking and listening.

Listening and talking

- At early level, most children take turns and follow instructions well. A few are now ready to answer simple questions about stories they are reading. At first level, almost all children take turns and build on each other's conversations successfully. They share their likes and dislikes about different books enthusiastically. At second level, most children are articulate and confident in contributing their ideas and opinions.

Reading

- Across the school, almost all children have developed reading skills to a very high standard for their age and stage. At early level almost all children use their knowledge of sounds effectively to read simple words. They ask and answer questions very successfully about the characters they are reading about. At first level almost all children read with expression accurately using punctuation very well. They can successfully answer a range of questions successfully. At second level, almost all children explain the difference between fact and opinion confidently. They skim and scan texts quickly for information to evidence their opinion.

Writing

- At early level, almost all children are writing simple words independently. A few are writing five letter words correctly. At first level almost all children create interesting stories with well-structured paragraphs. Most children spell words accurately, challenging themselves to

spell tricky or unfamiliar words. At second level, almost all children include metaphors, alliteration and onomatopoeia in their stories. This is strengthening their writing style.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Across the school almost all children are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are achieving beyond expected levels.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, almost all children confidently count forwards and backwards to 20. They use their growing knowledge of maths and numeracy in their play. At first level, almost all children are able to accurately round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They read, write and order whole numbers up to 1,000 and add and subtract three digit numbers. Almost all children at second level, add and subtract numbers to 10,000 and beyond with accuracy. They confidently apply their number skills in real-life contexts and discuss their solutions to verbalise their thought process.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children continue simple patterns involving objects, shapes and numbers. At first level almost all children demonstrate a very good understanding of a wide range of angles including right, acute, obtuse and straight. At second level, almost all children use their knowledge of the link between the eight compass points and angles to describe, follow and record directions. They are confident in measuring angles but would benefit from revisiting the properties of a circle, understanding what the radius is, how it connects to the diameter, and how to measure the circumference.

Information handling

- At early level, almost all children gather and record information in different ways such as pictorial charts and simple bar graphs. At first level, almost all children use information to create different types of graphs and talk confidently about their real life experience of using graphs. Almost all children at second level successfully present information in a range of ways including line graphs, bar graphs and pie charts. They have a strong understanding of the purpose of different types of graphs and describe this well including making links to the stock market use of graphs.

Attainment over time

- Children's attendance is above the national average. Currently, attendance across the school is 94.6%. Senior leaders track attendance and late coming very effectively. Children's absence is mostly due to family holidays. When children require part-time timetables, staff work successfully with parents and partners to maintain learning opportunities. They now need to ensure that their plans are revisited more regularly to increase attendance at school. In recent years there have been no exclusions.
- The school's data reflects consistently very high levels of attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics over several years. Most children make very good progress over time in literacy and numeracy from prior levels of attainment. At key stages, attainment

in numeracy, reading, talking and listening is consistently higher than local, virtual and national comparators.

- Senior leaders make highly effective use of attainment over time data to identify and implement improvements to teaching and learning. This strategic approach is leading to sustained and measurable increases in children's progress across the school. The headteacher has robust processes in place to monitor and track children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders meet with teachers regularly to discuss children's progress, including those who require additional support with their learning. This approach helps teachers identify where more challenge or support is required to ensure children make the best possible progress.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- The headteacher promotes a strong culture of recognising wider achievement. Staff celebrate successes through assemblies, certificates, and highly coveted personal shields. Senior leaders record achievements over time. This approach allows children to see their achievements build and develop over time, helping them recognise their progress and grow in confidence.
- Staff track children's participation and engagement in a range of clubs such as school choir, knitting club and the pupil instigated reading club. They identify gaps in participation for individual children and plan experiences during the school week to reduce the risk of any child missing out. Most children participate well in clubs and discuss confidently the communication skills they gain as a result. Children highly value their sports clubs, including the league-winning football team.
- All children contribute to school and community life through leadership groups such as the rights group, reading schools group, eco group, and house captains. They explain clearly the leadership skills they are developing. Learners collaborate across stages through the highly valued 'Team Time', gaining skills for learning, life, and work. For example, they work together on Dragon's Den-style challenges. Children appreciate these cross-stage opportunities and speak enthusiastically about the team-building skills they are developing.
- Children perform at events which helps children become confident individuals. For example, Primary 1 and 2 children performed a nativity for their parents confidently. Older children take part in the highly valued school show. In addition, children contribute to their wider community. For example, the 'rota group' organised a collection for a local foodbank very successfully. These opportunities encourage children to understand their role as effective contributors in their wider community.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff understand the school's socio-economic context very well and maintain trusted relationships with families. They recognise that poverty is not always visible and ensure no child is excluded from opportunities. For example, all children are supported to access clubs and trips, including the P7 residential. Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is also used effectively to provide targeted learning support that reduces barriers and improves outcomes

for identified learners. Senior leaders should now involve children and parents more fully in decisions about PEF is used.

- The headteacher has a very clear strategy for addressing inequities that includes improving universal support for children, with a focus on reading and writing. She uses PEF very effectively to employ an additional teacher to upskill staff in literacy approaches. These approaches are raising attainment, including for those impacted by poverty. Senior leaders should further develop and refine approaches to tracking and evaluating the impact of equity interventions. This will enable them to identify which strategies are most effective in improving outcomes and inform future planning. In addition, support staff are coached to provide impactful interventions for a few children. These interventions are accelerating progress for the majority of children who benefit from them. As a result, there are now few poverty-related attainment gaps among those who are attaining expected levels.

Other relevant evidence

- Children experience two hours of quality physical education each week.
- Senior leaders should ensure all staff implement a consistent and progressive approach across the school in learning Spanish from P1 to P7 and from Primary 5–7 in French, as a second 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.
- 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. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Whole-school approach to improving reading that leads to a love of reading

This is a strong example of how the school has developed a consistent approach to improving the teaching and learning of reading skills. Staff provide explicit teaching of reading strategies to a very high standard. This has led to children demonstrating a very strong commitment to reading for pleasure. This rich and enabling reading culture is contributing to improved engagement and outcomes in literacy.

- Staff use a progressive approach to developing reading, building strong foundation in reading skills that lead to fluent and confident readers, who read with expression.
- Younger children are encouraged to be ambitious in their reading and writing of words. Children are explicitly taught phonemes systematically. This has led to younger children tackling words beyond expected levels.
- Staff teach explicit reading strategies with an emphasis on strengthening vocabulary, developing inference skills, building an awareness of the writers' craft and the use of punctuation. This leads to children's developing comprehension skills very effectively.
- High expectations for all, alongside discrete targeted supports, encourage children to view themselves as successful readers.
- Teachers adapt their environment, teaching strategies and resources to close gaps before they widen. A 'three read' approach allows all children to engage with the class novels. This results in children showing high levels of engagement and motivation.
- Strong reading skills, alongside reading for enjoyment strategies, foster a positive and successful reading culture.

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.