

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's Primary School (Hamilton)

South Lanarkshire Council

19 August 2025

Key contextual information

St Mary's Primary School is a Roman Catholic denominational school situated in Hamilton in South Lanarkshire and is part of the Holy Cross Learning Community. The roll is 460 children across 15 classes. The headteacher has been in post for 10 years and is supported by two deputy headteachers and two principal teachers. There are a large number of placing requests each year and 22% of children live outwith the catchment area. In September 2023, 27% of children had additional support needs. Children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1-10.

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

- All children benefit from a warm, caring and inclusive learning environment. Staff promote a consistent and nurturing approach which has a very positive effect on children's readiness to learn. Relationships within the wider school community are strong and respectful. Pupils are polite, thoughtful and supportive of each other. Almost all children listen attentively to adults and peers and participate confidently in class discussions. Children speak proudly about the positive difference they make as they lead their own learning. Senior leaders and staff have high expectations for what children can achieve.
- Staff place a strong emphasis on children's rights. Teachers reference rights in daily routines to help children understand both their own rights and those of others. They provide clear routines and carefully planned lessons that enable most children to stay focused and engaged in their learning. Children work very well independently, with partners and in groups. The skilful support staff deliver targeted interventions very effectively. This helps children reach their personal targets and fully access all areas of the curriculum.
- The strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteachers has driven significant improvements in whole school approaches to learning and teaching, based on educational research. Almost all children engage very well with the high quality and stimulating learning experiences provided across the school. Teachers make very appropriate use of contextualised learning. This supports high levels of learner engagement and allows children to transfer their knowledge and skills across curricular areas. Children select from a wide range of strategies to solve problems in a way that best suits their own skill set. In so doing, they acquire autonomy and experience learning in considerable depth. Children are confident learners who clearly understand the purpose of their learning. Regular effective feedback between teachers and children supports this understanding and is a consistent feature throughout the school. Children are enthusiastic and reflective learners. Teachers plan motivating learning activities, closely linked to children's interests. These activities support effectively the development of a high level of creativity and problem-solving skills. All classes currently use the school grounds to take learning outside on a regular basis.

- Throughout the school, teachers use digital technology effectively to enhance and support children's learning through extensive use of digital devices and bar matrix codes. This motivates and engages children very effectively in their learning. All children in P1-3 develop independent learning skills through online resources in reading and mathematics. Children and families access learning platforms at home and in school, with a focus on extending and consolidating literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Children, including those who are neuro-divergent, benefit from recent staff professional learning in the use of assistive technologies. A few children benefit from the provision of digital devices which enable them to access learning more readily.
- In a majority of classes, teachers maintain a well-paced flow. They limit extended periods of teacher talk and respond actively to learners' needs and contributions throughout the lesson. In these classes, children are very engaged and motivated. This approach is supporting children with additional support needs effectively, while also providing appropriate challenge for all learners.
- At early level, children are motivated and engage well in play-based activities that encourage curiosity and creativity. Teachers make very strong use of literacy and numeracy provocations and use the learning space well to enhance children's experiences. There is an appropriate balance of adult directed, adult-initiated and child-led activities which is supporting learners' engagement well. Teachers are developing their skills in observing and assessing learning through play and using this evidence effectively to plan next steps. Teachers are encouraged to continue engaging in professional learning around the principles of play. They share their expertise across the school and local authority. Staff should continue to develop their use of books and other written materials to show how literacy and numeracy are embedded across all areas of play.
- In almost all lessons, children work with teachers to create statements about how they will know when they are successful in their learning. These carefully crafted statements are based on the skills they are focusing on. As a result, most children explain the purpose of their learning and understand clearly why tasks and activities are important. In most classes, children know they are building on prior learning and how this relates to current learning. All lessons include high quality plenary sessions which recap on learning. Most teachers use questioning successfully to check children's understanding and recall what they have previously learned. Teachers should continue to develop their use of higher order thinking skills to extend children's thinking further.
- In most classes, teachers use a variety of formative assessment methods to give children helpful feedback. This supports children to understand their next steps in learning highly effectively. A majority of children are aware of their long-term personal learning targets. Teachers should continue to support a few children to understand clearly their targets and next steps in learning. Most children regularly take part in high-quality peer and self-assessment. They support each other well to understand how successful they have been in learning and identify what steps they should take next.
- Senior leaders use a well-developed and clear framework for assessment. This helps staff to make assessment an ongoing part of planned learning and guide their teaching. The framework clearly sets out when key assessments take place throughout the school year. All teachers use a variety of summative and standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy effectively to establish starting points and track children's progress. Teachers are increasingly using high quality assessments to support children to demonstrate how they apply skills across the curriculum. As planned, senior leaders should now develop assessment approaches across all curricular areas.

- Staff value the opportunity to engage in moderation activities within school and across the learning community. This is improving teachers' confidence and professional judgements. Senior leaders should continue to develop approaches to moderation. This should further improve staff confidence in using data to support planning and tracking in all curricular areas.
- All teachers use local authority progression pathways effectively to plan children's learning. They work very well together in stage teams, to create a consistent approach to planning high quality learning experiences for all children. Children are increasingly able to influence what and how they learn through 'what I know' and 'what I want to know' activities.
- Senior leaders and teachers meet each term and track closely children's progress. They use a 'Collaborative, Fact, Story, Action' approach to discuss how planned learning is impacting progress across all areas of the curriculum. These meetings help staff develop a clear understanding of each learner's needs. Staff use the information gathered to plan and deliver very effective targeted support for children who are not yet meeting expected levels.
- Senior leaders and staff gather detailed high-quality information relating to children and their learning needs. They systematically review and update this information at key points throughout the year. This rigorous process provides relevant and timely information which supports staff to plan learning to meet children's learning needs very effectively. The data gathered provides senior leaders and staff with a strategic overview of the attainment and progress of individuals, as well as of cohorts of learners. Staff use effective and supportive interventions to accelerate children's progress. This includes children who are care experienced, those impacted by poverty and those who require additional support with learning. Teachers plan careful and appropriate differentiated learning across all areas of the curriculum. They should continue to use monitoring and tracking and assessment information to plan learning that provides all children with increased challenge in their learning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

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

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is very good. Almost all children in P4 and most children in P1 and P7 achieve expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in listening and talking. Most children at P1, P4 and P7 achieve expected CfE levels in reading and writing. Most children at P1 and P4 and the majority at P7 achieve expected CfE levels in numeracy. Across the school, a few children exceed national expectations in literacy and numeracy.
- Almost all children who require additional support make appropriate progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make very good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- At early level, most children listen and follow simple instructions. They communicate clearly and use different vocabulary in a range of contexts. At first level, almost all children listen well to each other and respond appropriately. At second level, most children contribute to discussions, offering opinions and showing respect for the views of others. Across the school, most children demonstrate confidence in listening and talking in different contexts.

Reading

- At early level, most children enjoy reading. They hear and say sounds made by a combination of letters. At first level, most children talk confidently about different texts that they enjoy reading and read aloud with expression. They should continue to develop strategies to understand new vocabulary and texts. At second level, most children use a range of reading skills to read and understand texts. Children should read and analyse a wider range of texts, including poetry and non-fiction.

Writing

- At early level, most children write familiar words correctly to convey information or an idea. They use capital letters and full stops appropriately. At first level, most children write in a variety of genres and use appropriate punctuation. They use vocabulary as appropriate to the purpose. At second level, most children create texts for a range of purposes selecting an appropriate structure and style. They use self and peer assessment to review their writing to make sure it is technically accurate. They use appropriate vocabulary to suit a specific purpose and audience.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, almost all children are confident in their numeracy skills. They count forwards and backwards within 20. They are developing well mental agility and knowledge of number facts and add and subtract within 10. They confidently identify and use a range of coins to £1, applying their addition skills to this context. Almost all children working at first level round whole numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They have good mental strategies and apply these to word problems. Although they have a good understanding of basic fractions, they would benefit from revisiting how to correctly notate fractions. At second level, most children add and subtract multiples of 10, 100, and 1000 from whole numbers. They are confident in using multiplication but would benefit from further work on division with remainders. Most children at second level correctly write simple fractions as decimals and percentages. They would benefit from more practice in calculating simple fractions or percentages of whole numbers.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, almost all children confidently identify two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. Almost all children at first level, name and describe the properties of 3D objects and identify lines of symmetry in common shapes. They demonstrate a good understanding of angles and can confidently use compass points such as North, South, East, and West. Most children at second level classify and measure angles accurately, including right, acute, obtuse and reflex angles.

Information handling

- Almost all children at the early level use their understanding of colour, size, and shape effectively to match and sort objects. At first level, almost all children confidently apply their number skills to create tally marks and to construct and interpret bar graphs. They also benefit from opportunities to transfer this learning across other curricular areas and in day-to-day activities. At second level, almost all children demonstrate their ability to organise and analyse data using bar graphs, tables, and pie charts.

Attainment over time

- Attendance in session 2023/24 was 93.7%. This is in line with the national average. Senior leaders use the local authority guidelines to manage attendance well. The main impact on levels of attendance is families who take holidays during term time. Senior leaders monitor and track effectively attendance for all children. They act promptly where individual attendance dips below 95%. Senior leaders work with families to provide support to improve children's attendance at school. These interventions are having a positive impact on the attendance of individual children. There are no children on part time timetables.
- Staff use a wide range of reliable assessment data very well to address any attainment gaps through targeted support and universal approaches. For example, senior leaders and staff identified gaps in children's numeracy and writing across the school. They developed a clear strategy to improve the curriculum, teaching and assessment in these areas. This is ensuring children are developing very well their skills in numeracy and mathematics. The development of writing, with a clear link to reading, is ensuring a clearly structured and consistent approach to the development of skills across the school. Senior leaders should continue to monitor and track children's progress across literacy and numeracy as they move from stage to stage across the school. They should extend tracking of children's progress to all other curricular areas.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- All staff celebrate and value children's achievements in and out of school, in class, at assembly, in newsletters and through social media. Staff encourage parents to share children's successes from outwith school. Children appreciate the wide range of awards they receive in recognition of their achievements. These include Skills Notes, House Points, the Award for Writing and Above and Beyond Awards for exemplifying the four capacities. Children are proud to share and celebrate their achievements and awards with the whole community. This is helping children develop as confident individuals and successful learners.
- Across the school, there is a wide range of opportunities for children to develop their leadership skills and achieve personal success. All children are members of one of the 16 pupil voice committees. These include Rights Respecting School, Liturgy, Junior Road Safety, Laudato Si and Health and Wellbeing. Children gather pupil views and present their findings at assemblies and on displays in the school. All children play an active role within their school community as responsible citizens and effective contributors. The 'Collecting Opinions to Grow our School' (COGS) house groups consider how they can improve the school. This has led to the introduction of a number of pupil and staff led clubs such as playground leaders, calm crew and chess club. As a result, children feel their views are valued and they can help make the school better. They enjoy taking on these responsibilities and developing their communication, collaboration and organisational skills.
- Most children engage well in the very wide range of clubs provided by school staff. This includes football, dance, art, badminton, debate and school choir. Staff track children's participation and engagement in clubs and activities in and out of school. They identify gaps in participation for individual children and plan for opportunities and experiences to reduce the risk of any child missing out. These clubs and activities support children well to develop their confidence, teamwork and communication skills. Children are developing their skills for learning, life and work, including leadership, as a result of their participation in these purposeful activities. Staff should now develop their tracking approaches further to include the skills children are developing as a result of their participation and achievements.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders track and monitor the progress of all children, including those who have barriers to learning or experience disadvantage. Senior leaders and staff identify any gaps in learning and plan effective targeted interventions for these children. Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is being used effectively to provide additional staffing for targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy and assistive digital technology. There is clear evidence that this work is having a positive impact on children's progress in learning. As part of pupil voice, children are involved in a 'participatory budgeting' process to inform the use of part of the school's PEF and play an important leadership role.
- All staff know children and their families very well and have a strong understanding of the socio-economic context of the school community. A clear plan, strongly supported by the Parent Council, is in place to reduce the cost of the school day. This has been shared with the whole school community. Staff plan interventions to ensure all aspects of school life, including school events and celebrations, are accessible to all. For example, a breakfast club, free snacks and school uniform are available for all children across the school to mitigate the cost of the school day. Funding from PEF and the School Assistance Fund has been allocated to support individuals who face financial barriers. This enables them to access all excursions and residential trips.

Other relevant evidence

Other areas of curriculum:

Religious Education and Catholic Ethos

Children receive their full entitlement to religious education and observance. The school's strong Catholic ethos is clearly evident throughout daily life. During the year, children take an active role in leading and participating in liturgical celebrations with the school and parish community. They speak confidently about how these experiences support and strengthen their shared faith. Through participation in the *Laudato Si'* schools programme, children and staff work together to promote the 'Common Good', linking this with learning for sustainability.

Library

Children borrow fiction or non-fiction from the attractive school library. Children are supported to read a wider range of authors as they progress through the school. Staff actively promote reading for enjoyment across the school. All stages have access to a wide range of books in classrooms and in small library areas throughout the building. These resources reflect a diverse selection of texts. Children speak positively about reading and enjoy recommending books to their peers.

Physical Education

All children receive their full entitlement of two hours of high-quality physical education each week. This includes a balance of indoor and outdoor activities.

Modern Languages

Teachers plan effectively to ensure children experience progression in learning Spanish from P1 to P7. French is taught from P5-7.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Numeracy and mathematics: Across the school children display a strong confidence in their own numeracy and mathematical skills. Teachers scaffold learning effectively to enable all children to experience success. Teaching approaches balance carefully knowledge and skills and continuously build on prior learning. Children select from a wide range of strategies to solve problems in a way that best suits their own skill set. In so doing they acquire autonomy and experience learning in considerable depth. Children relish challenge and describe eloquently how much they enjoy learning in this way.

The school took part in piloting the new Education Scotland Mathematics Self-Evaluation Framework from December to April 2025. Nominated by their local authority, the school was selected to be filmed to share their improvement journey and how staff have engaged with the framework. This work has supported staff well in identifying strengths in their current practice and agreeing next steps for improvement. The framework has played a valuable role in helping the school plan its next steps in developing Numeracy and Mathematics—an area already identified in the school improvement plan and set to continue as a focus next session. Staff engaged positively with the framework and, through rigorous self-evaluation, correctly identified fractions, decimals, and percentages as a key area for development. The framework has provided a clear direction for improvement. Senior leaders are also exploring ways to involve children and parents more in this improvement journey.

A focus on skills development as an integral part of learning: Senior leaders and staff have a strong focus on the acquisition of skills such as creativity and curiosity. Children learn to apply these skills across all aspects of their learning. This is organised highly effectively under the four capacities. Teachers' appropriate use of contextualised learning supports high levels of learner engagement and allows children to transfer their knowledge and skills across curricular areas and their opportunities for achievement. Learners have demonstrated that they can talk about their achievements and identify the skills they have developed in line with the four capacities. At SPARKLE (Sharing Pupil Achievements, Recognising Knowledge, skills, Learning and Excellence) events, children demonstrate to their families a wide range of meta skills. There are Skills groups, led by utilising the expertise of teaching, support staff and parents and carers.

Explanation of terms of quantity

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

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

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