

Summarised inspection findings

Netherlea School

Independent

4 March 2025

Key contextual information

Netherlea School is managed within the Applied Care and Development (ACAD) organisation, which is a subsidiary of the proprietor, CareTech Community Services Ltd. It is an all-through independent special school, located in Dumfries. The school supports children and young people who have faced significant disruption to their learning as a result of social, emotional and behavioural needs, autistic spectrum disorder or learning difficulties. The school registration is for up to 16 children and young people between the ages of eight years old and 18 years old.

A headteacher leads the education team. A Head of Education from the ACAD organisation provides regular support to the headteacher. There are four teachers and two higher-level teaching assistants that provide learning activities for children and young people.

The school provides care and education placement for children and young people in addition to day-only educational placements. At the time of the inspection, nine children and young people were on the school roll. Most children and young people live in one of the ACAD residential houses.

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 built very positive relationships with young people. They are warm and welcoming and understand well the needs of children and young people. Staff work well with most children and young people to develop their understanding of their rights and the value they have within their community. This includes staff keeping a focus on children's rights within children and young people's curriculum activities. Overall, staff create a positive learning environment resulting in the majority of children and young people engaging well in planned activities. When children and young people do display distressed behaviours, staff respond appropriately to help children and young people settle once more.
- Staff provide the majority of children and young people with activities that are appropriately challenging and well matched to their needs. This ensures that these children and young people build upon prior learning and remain engaged in their learning. In a minority of activities, teachers work well with children and young people to provide opportunities to exercise choice during the lesson. Children and young people respond well to this approach, which is having a positive impact on their engagement levels. Staff should build upon this and support all children and young people to exercise choice, improve their motivation to learn and increase the length of periods of their engagement.
- In most lessons, children and young people understand the purpose of learning and this supports them to settle well into tasks and activities. In the majority of lessons, teachers are

clear with their explanations and instructions. They support the majority of children and young people to make progress in their learning. In a few lessons, staff use questioning effectively to help children and young people deepen their understanding of what is being learned. Teachers should now develop further their use of questioning in lessons. They need to ensure their use of questions is consistently developing children and young people's curiosity and is deepening their understanding across an increased range of curriculum areas.

- Overall, staff use praise well to motivate children and young people. This helps the majority of children and young people to remain on task and take on more challenging learning. Teachers use feedback effectively in a minority of lessons to support children and young people to know how well they are progressing in learning. The headteacher should work with teachers to develop a consistent approach to the use of high-quality feedback. This will help teachers make adaptations to learning and ensure that children and young people build upon their strengths and have an understanding of what they need to do next.
- Staff provide children and young people with attractive learning environments. They make effective use of classroom spaces, which supports children and young people to increase their motivation to learn. The majority of staff use digital technology well to consolidate, expand and reinforce learning, predominantly through the use of online video clips. The headteacher and staff have made a very positive start to improving the outdoor learning space attached to the school. For example, they are working with children and young people to build a poly tunnel in the outdoor learning space. This is beginning to support children and young people's horticulture projects and has potential to support an increased amount of achievement opportunities. Staff use a few community resources well to provide children and young people with access to high-quality sporting activities. They should now consider how to use other community locations to enhance other areas of children and young people's curriculum.
- Teachers use assessments well to understand children and young people's progress with their emotional wellbeing. They gather relevant information about the young person's profile and use this to develop plans to promote positive behaviour. Additionally, staff use this assessment information effectively to improve children and young people's wellbeing and emotional needs. This enables the majority of children and young people to re-engage successfully with learning quickly following episodes of distressed behaviours. Staff should continue to build on their sensitive approach to meeting the needs of children and young people. This will help them return all children and young people to planned learning more quickly.
- Teachers are beginning to assess progress across the curriculum increasingly well. This is beginning to improve the accuracy of their judgements around children and young people's progress. Teachers should continue with their work to develop assessment approaches as part of planning learning and teaching. This will help teachers to gather more reliable and robust information on the progress that children and young people are making.
- Teachers are at the earliest stages of working together to moderate children and young people's progress in learning. The headteacher should work with teachers to formalise moderation arrangements across the school year. They should consider how to provide opportunities for teachers to work with peers from other schools. This will support teachers to increase their confidence and develop further a shared understanding of national standards. Teachers would benefit from a structured approach to professional learning to help them enhance and develop further their pedagogical approaches.

- Staff plan lessons that are appropriately challenging and well matched to the needs of the majority of children and young people. Teachers plan for children and young people's learning using short and medium term planning approaches. The headteacher and teachers have correctly identified that they now need to develop a consistent approach to planning. This will ensure that teachers are clearer on the progress that they expect children and young people to make across the curriculum. It will help them plan, based on assessment information, what children and young people can achieve over time. They are now developing a number of useful planning systems. However, it is too early to evidence how this is impacting on outcomes or the progress children and young people make in learning.
- Staff work together to develop relevant individualised education programmes (IEP) for most children and young people. They develop appropriate targets for children and young people to achieve, predominantly around literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. They link these targets into multi-agency plans for children and young people. They should now review targets to ensure that IEPs are measurable and state clearly the intended outcomes for all children and young people. Staff should consider how to increase children and young people's participation in setting targets. This will help children and young people have a greater understanding of how they can achieve positive outcomes.
- The headteacher and staff are beginning to track and monitor curricular coverage increasingly well using an agreed system. This is providing them with useful information on what children and young people are learning within and across curricular areas. They use this information to inform future planning and to plan for progressive learning to take place. The headteacher and staff should continue as planned to improve their approaches to tracking and monitoring. They should consider what other relevant information and data will help them evidence fully the impact of the support offered to children and young people. This will help them check the quality of their teaching approaches and how well they improve outcomes for children and young people.

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 proprietor.

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

- The majority of children and young people working at the broad general education (BGE) stages make satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy. A few children and young people make good progress. A few children and young people would benefit from more support and challenge in their learning to help them make better progress. A few children and young people are making limited progress. This limited progress is linked directly to children and young people's low attendance at school. They are not accessing enough learning opportunities available to them.
- Since August 2019, the majority of young people in the senior phase have attained appropriate Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications awards for English or literacy and mathematics or numeracy at National 4. A minority of young people have left the school with no National Qualification unit awards or full National Qualification awards for English or literacy and mathematics or numeracy. A few young people have attained literacy and numeracy full awards at National 5 successfully.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, the majority of children and young people make satisfactory progress from prior levels of attainment in reading, writing and listening and talking. The minority of children and young people require more support to develop further their writing and talking and listening skills.

Listening and talking

- Children and young people hold regular discussions with familiar adults across the school day. This is almost always highly supported within very small groups or as individuals. The majority of children and young people demonstrate the skills they require to share their views and listen effectively to the responses of others. The majority of children and young people articulate information well when working with staff. A minority of children and young people need to develop further their awareness of how to present information, for example when sharing their learning with staff. The majority of children and young people need to practise their skills for good listening and talking, particularly when turn-taking is required.

Reading

- Children and young people working at first level are progressing well and gaining confidence when reading aloud. They are recognising an increasing number of words. Children and young people working at second level read with increasing fluency and use punctuation to support them understand texts. Children and young people are developing well their understanding of inference. They now need to develop further their skills to find key information in texts with increasing independence.

- All children and young people have a daily timetabled opportunity to read for pleasure using a small class library area or through identification of a text of interest. Only a few children and young people engage meaningfully in this. Staff should continue to encourage all children and young people to engage fully in reading for pleasure to continue to develop a positive culture of reading. They should develop a wider range of approaches to help children and young people enjoy reading or engage with texts.

Writing

- The majority of children and young people across all levels write very short texts or complete pre-generated texts with missing words. Most children and young people can form letters, words and sentences correctly. They will select appropriate vocabulary and language that matches well the purpose of their writing. Children and young people should now be supported to develop their use of sentences of different lengths and write extended texts for different purposes.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, the majority of children and young people's progress in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory.

Number, money and measure

- Children and young people round numbers accurately to the nearest 10, 100 and 1000 appropriate to their level. They use their understanding of number and measure very well during practical cookery activities to measure out ingredients accurately. Children and young people working at first level undertake calculations for basic number operations accurately using appropriate strategies. Children and young people working at first and second level now need to develop further their understanding and knowledge of fractions, decimals and percentages.

Shape, position and movement

- Most children and young people are confident in sorting or describing properties of common two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes, appropriate to their level. They can measure angles and draw shapes accurately. They now need to develop further how to work out missing angles of shapes using their knowledge of a shape's properties.

Information handling

- Children and young people record accurately information using surveys, tally marks and bar graphs for a range of purposes. They can interpret information within a range of data that is presented. They now need to increase their knowledge and application of skills to record and display data, for example, using line graphs, pie charts, Carroll diagrams and Venn diagrams.

Attainment over time

- In the BGE stage, children and young people make satisfactory progress from their prior levels of attainment. The headteacher now needs to establish a robust tracking system for children and young people. They should ensure they have up to date and accurate information about how well children and young people are progressing in learning across all curriculum areas.
- The majority of young people make good progress in their senior phase in attaining a small number of National Qualifications, course and unit awards. This is mainly at National 3, National 4 and predominantly in literacy, numeracy and hospitality. In recent years, the majority of young people have increased the number of National Qualifications attained at National 3 and National 4. For example, a growing number of young people attain media, administration and information and communication technologies, environmental sciences and practical cookery awards. For a minority of young people, this includes attaining National Qualification

awards at National 5 level. The headteacher should now ensure that staff help all young people maximise their opportunities to attain across a wider range of qualifications. For example, there are curriculum activities that young people work on that do not lead to appropriate qualifications. The headteacher should continue to work with staff to develop the senior phase further. They should continue to increase the potential for young people to attain more qualifications and, for a minority, at a higher level.

- Children and young people's attendance at school is below national averages for special schools. In recent years, the average attendance rate for all children and young people attending the school attendance has declined. This session, the majority of children and young people have attendance below 75%. Current interventions are having limited impact on those with significantly low attendance rates. The minority of children and young people at the school establish positive patterns of attendance at school. Most children and young people need to continue to improve their attendance further. The headteacher, supported by the proprietor should work across services to ensure positive patterns of attendance are established, particularly for children and young people residing in ACAD residences. They should work to formally record exclusions in line with national guidance.
- Children and young people starting their placement at Netherlea School regularly begin on a part-time timetable, in line with their additional support needs and agreed transition plan. The headteacher and staff work very well to increase children and young people's time in school quickly as they become comfortable with new relationships and expectations around learning.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Almost all children and young people engage well in wider achievement learning experiences. Most of these children and young people achieve a small number of National Youth Awards that recognise their personal achievements and their demonstration of skills for learning, life and work appropriately. For example, most children and young people obtain accreditation in John Muir Awards at Explorer or Discovery levels. Recently, the minority of children and young people obtain Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) short course awards. Staff should now work with children and young people to identify further the skills they develop and their personal achievements. They should continue to consider ways to increase accreditation of these skills and achievements where appropriate.
- Children and young people are supporting the school achieve a national award that recognises how well their rights are respected. Children and young people are building a meaningful understanding of their rights. The headteacher should, as planned, help children and young people establish a young person's leadership group. They should help children and young people participate purposefully in improving the life and work of the school. This will help children and young people increasingly apply their rights and build valuable leadership skills that they can use across all aspect of their life.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff are effective in developing their understanding of children and young people's wellbeing and social and educational contexts. They use this information well to reduce the barriers children and young people face when returning to educational programmes following periods of prolonged disruption in other establishments. The headteacher, supported by the proprietor, ensures that there are no costs to children and young people or their families surrounding the school day. This includes, food, trips and accessing wider achievement opportunities.
- Children and young people build relevant and important life skills at Netherlea School. This results in most children and young people moving onto meaningful and positive destinations

when they leave school. Their positive destinations include college placements, modern apprenticeships and work. The majority of children and young people sustain their positive destinations successfully.

- The headteacher needs to lengthen the school week to ensure that children and young people are not disadvantaged in relation to their peers in other schools.

Other relevant evidence

- Children and young people do not yet have access to minimum expectations around high-quality learning experiences in physical education. However, most children and young people do access regular sporting activity across their school week. Staff need to plan physical education programmes that are progressive and that build upon children and young people's individual skills.
- Children and young people do not yet have their entitlement to 1+2 approach to modern languages met. Staff should now work to ensure that children and young people are supported to learn other languages and are supported to build upon their prior learning across the curriculum.
- The proprietor should develop robust governance arrangements to ensure that all teachers are registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Furthermore, they should ensure that all support staff who provide learning activities are appropriately supervised by a teacher.

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.