

Summarised inspection findings

Melville-Knox Highland

Independent School

Post-registration inspection

12 August 2025

Key contextual information

Melville-Knox Highland is a small independent Christian school located in Rosskeen Free Church in Achnagarron, near Invergordon. The school opened to pupils in September 2024. It is registered to provide education for a maximum of 17 pupils of primary school age. The school has plans in place to seek to extend the numbers of children who can attend. At the time of inspection, there were 17 children on the school roll. The school is a registered charity.

1.4 Leadership and management of staff	very good
This indicator highlights the importance of sound governance and fair and proper recruitment and selection of staff. It focuses on accountability, responsibility and shared values as important features of building and sustaining a highly-professional staff team. Effective empowerment of staff and partners with due regard to wellbeing and positive relationships is a key feature of a successful professional team. The themes are: ■ Governance framework ■ Building and sustaining a professional staff team ■ Staff wellbeing and pastoral support	

- The school has an effective and very well organised Board, with sub committees that provide robust strategic leadership and governance on a range of school matters. Individual Board members and co-opted members, who have a range of professional backgrounds, contribute to overseeing various aspects of the development and work of the school. This includes for finances, the school building and resources, curriculum and teaching, and for child protection and wellbeing. The purpose, duties and scope of the Board is clearly set out in policies. There is a high level of accountability and transparency in the decision-making processes for the school. The school management committee (SMC) comprises the Principal Teacher who takes on the role of leadership of learning and teaching, the School Administrator and School Bursar. Together, they have responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school and do this very effectively. As the school expands and numbers of children and staff increase, the Board should continue with plans to recruit a headteacher.
- The Board and staff have a clear vision for the future direction and growth of the school. They are rightly very proud of all they have achieved within their first year as a new school. The Board has met on a frequent basis to ensure that the development of processes and procedures are implemented successfully and monitored carefully. Together, the Board and staff have established very clear policies and working procedures for all aspects of school life. As these approaches are now becoming embedded in practice, the Board are well placed to adopt a more strategic, and less operational role. With the support of a team of dedicated volunteers, and with the strong support of families, the Board, SMC and staff are ensuring that children are benefiting from well-planned learning experiences and sound pastoral care.
- Parents and extended families of children attending the school are an important part in the success of the school. The active Parents and Friends Association (PFA) works hard to raise funds for resources and to enhance children’s experiences. The PFA also provides valuable feedback to the Board on what is working well in the school and areas that could be improved. This very positive and collaborative approach strengthens the school’s approach to improvement planning and development through self-evaluation. Parents are very happy with the school and how it is progressing.

- The Board ensures that safe and effective recruitment practices are in place for all staff and volunteers. Teachers are registered appropriately with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Well-judged policies in relation to staffing matters have been devised and shared with all staff and volunteers. This ensures that the Board's high expectations of adults as positive role models for children are well understood.
- Staff, the SMC and Board members are outward looking and have established valuable links with other schools, locally and further afield. This helps staff and Board members to share practice, ideas and resources with colleagues in similar settings.
- The Board is ensuring that the wellbeing of staff and volunteers is given appropriately high priority. Flexible working patterns allow staff and volunteers to maximise their contributions to school life.

1.5 Management of resources to promote equity

Management of resources and environment for learning

- The school accommodation provides a secure, safe and appropriately equipped learning environment for children. There is one main classroom and staff use smaller rooms as break-out teaching areas for smaller group lessons and activities.
- Children have access to the enclosed church grounds during break times and for learning outdoors, for example for physical education (PE). This includes a grassy area with play equipment and a tarmac area for games.
- The classroom furniture is an appropriate size for the differing ages of children, and the church building provides areas for storage of equipment and resources. Staff and children have access to digital technology via laptops, although wi-fi access is limited due to connectivity issues, and the school's rural location. The shared nature of the accommodation means school staff must tidy away all resources at the end of each week.
- Staff have created a bank of appropriate core resources and textbooks for teaching the school's curriculum. There is a well-stocked class library which children help to maintain and keep tidy. Teachers often use audio and video resources to enhance lessons and activities. They are resourceful and creative in how they plan lessons, making the most of the learning spaces available to differentiate learning for the range of ages and abilities of children. As funds and resources allow, the school should develop further younger children's digital technology skills to support their learning across the curriculum.
- Over the past year, school staff have continued to extend their bank of teaching materials and resources. They have purchased art materials, musical instruments and PE equipment so that all children can take part in expressive arts. They continue to increase resources as required, often supported by funds from the PFA.

2.2 Curriculum

good

This indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs of learners at the centre of curriculum design and development. The structure and delivery of the curriculum should take good account of local and national circumstances. The curriculum is the totality of learning experiences across the four contexts as delivered by the school and its partners. An effective curriculum results in strong outcomes for all learners. The themes are:

- Rationale and design
- Development of the curriculum
- Learning pathways
- Skills for learning, life and work

- Children benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, that is broadly in line with Curriculum for Excellence guidance. Strong Christian values underpin all of the school's work and children's learning. The curriculum supports children's development of skills and knowledge well across an appropriate range of areas. It reflects the school's aims and visions well.
- Teachers use Curriculum for Excellence guidance, including experiences and outcomes, to guide development of programmes of study across all curriculum areas. The curriculum content is enhanced by volunteers who have expertise in areas such as physical activity, science and art. As planned, staff should continue to take forward the development of the curriculum, ensuring that there is progression in children's skills and knowledge across their learning.
- Teachers have made a good start to planning a rolling programme of meaningful and relevant contexts for project-based learning. There is a clear focus on selecting themes and topics that will motivate and interest learners, whilst reflecting the school's Christian ethos. For example, children enjoyed learning in depth about World War 2 and the importance of VE Day. They proudly shared their learning at an open day with parents and grandparents, who helped them to learn about this time in history in a meaningful way. Children would like to have more opportunities to now learn about other historical periods. Children benefit from learning about the solar system during science activities. A few children relish the opportunity to share the learning they have undertaken at home with their peers, and give comprehensive class talks with confidence.
- Staff use the school grounds and local community well to motivate children, such as visits from emergency services. School staff make good use of the local area to extend children's learning experiences. They use the local library and swimming pool to enhance the curriculum offer for older children. Children enthusiastically learn Dutch. They sing songs and can say and write simple phrases.
- Transitions are well managed by staff. Many of the children were home-schooled prior to joining Melville-Knox Highland. There are very positive relationships between families and school staff. This helped all children to settle quickly into school routines.
- Individual children are very knowledgeable across a range of subject areas. They enjoy learning in depth and researching information for real-life contexts. To complement this, staff should develop all children's awareness of the important meta-skills they are acquiring for learning, life and work.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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

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

- All staff work very effectively to create a highly caring and positive climate for learning. They pay good attention to identifying and addressing any potential barriers to learning that children may have. The volunteer classroom assistants each provide skilled and very effective support to children and teachers. Parents are very satisfied with all aspects of the school. They say that their children really enjoy learning at school and are becoming more confident.
- Overall, children engage enthusiastically in lessons and activities across the curriculum. For older children, teachers and volunteers provide dynamic, stimulating challenges and purposeful contexts for learning that capture their interests and which they enjoy very much. The youngest children are benefiting from daily opportunities to learn through play. For all children, their learning includes exciting provocations that inspire and promote thinking, curiosity and creativity. Across the school, children work very well independently and collaborate effectively when in pairs and groups. This supports them very well to develop creative and unique ideas and opinions.
- Teachers are skilled in carefully differentiating lessons and activities to meet the needs of the multi-stage composite nature of the school. Where necessary, individual children clearly benefit from receiving targeted support, for example, to address barriers to learning in spelling or gaps in learning in numeracy. Overall, tasks and activities are well planned, active in nature and appropriately challenging for the ages and abilities of children. As the school continues to develop and grow, it will be important for staff to continue to challenge higher-achieving children. A next step is to develop children's ability to demonstrate and apply their skills in different contexts and areas of learning, and in other areas of school life. Children would benefit from taking increasing ownership of their learning, for example, by setting targets for aspects of their work, and reviewing their own progress.
- Teachers are successful in using a range of direct and active teaching approaches which children respond to very well. Teachers use effective and varied questioning approaches to check for understanding and to illicit fulsome responses from children. Teachers are very good at giving children 'thinking time' when responding to questions during lessons and activities. As a result, children gain confidence and are more likely to experience success. Staff use the digital resources available to them well as part of their teaching approaches. Older children frequently use laptops as part of their tools for learning. As resources allow, this should be extended for younger children.
- During this initial year, the school has established a pupil council. Children really appreciate this and talk enthusiastically about their voice in deciding on textbooks for learning literacy. Before embarking on a new topic or area of learning, teachers are beginning to engage children in exploring what they already know about the subject/theme and what they would like to find out. A next step is for children to also be involved in how to present their learning and

how they would best like to learn about it. Using this approach, teachers will be able to involve children directly in helping to shape, plan and lead their own learning.

- Teachers and Board members are keen to research practice and to seek out appropriate professional learning opportunities. They have established purposeful links with local schools and similar Christian school settings in Scotland and the Netherlands. This is helping staff to develop the curriculum and to explore new resources for learning and teaching. Building on this positive approach, there is scope to develop this collaboration further to include opportunities for staff to moderate standards of children's progress and attainment with colleagues in other schools.
- Teachers use standardised assessments well to check on children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Staff use this data, in addition to a range of formative and summative assessment information, to inform their professional judgements, and to plan for children's next steps in learning. This includes seeking innovative ways to challenge high-achieving children appropriately. As the school progresses, teachers should continue to implement strategic approaches to tracking and monitoring attainment over time. This will provide the staff, SMC and parents with an overview of how well all children are progressing as they move through the school.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The school has a welcoming, positive and caring ethos. As a result, children say that they feel safe and well cared for. At the beginning of the school year, children worked with teachers to create a class charter that promotes kindness, respect and positive behaviours. Children have responded very well to this, and they are friendly, helpful, kind and supportive of each other. Parents are very happy with the family ethos of the school. They appreciate the approachable nature of staff and feel that their children are being supported well and encouraged to do their best.
- Children are developing an awareness of their own health and wellbeing. They complete questionnaires and surveys on their wellbeing and thoughts about school life. As a next step, staff should provide more opportunities for children to discuss and assess their own health and wellbeing, through exploration of the national wellbeing indicators.
- Children benefit from learning about aspects of health and wellbeing through topics and themes that are based on the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. Topics they have covered include aspects of personal safety, for example travelling to and from school, keeping safe online and healthy eating. The school has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying. Children feel confident that the school would take action to address any instances of bullying, should this ever occur. As the programme for health and wellbeing develops from year to year, staff should seek the views of children regarding the content and themes that they would like to see included.
- Board members and staff are aware of their statutory duties and implement these well. Staff are alert to any potential barriers to learning that children face. They are sensitive in their approaches to meeting any additional needs that children may have.
- The school's vision for future development includes the appropriate aim to ensure children are responsible members of their Christian community and the wider local community. The school can demonstrate that they are already working towards this by ensuring children engage in worthwhile life-long learning experiences, such as volunteering in the local foodbank. Staff should continue to seek ways for children to learn about a wider range of inequalities and diversity.

Practice worth sharing more widely

‘Bakery Maths’

- Dynamic, stimulating numeracy challenges capture children’s interests. This includes exciting provocations that inspire and promote children’s higher-order thinking skills, curiosity and creativity.

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.