

Summarised inspection findings

Mearns Castle High School

East Renfrewshire Council

28 April 2026

Key contextual information

School Name:	Mearns Castle High School
Council:	East Renfrewshire Council
SEED number:	8602239
Roll (January 2026):	1641 young people

Mearns Castle High School is a non-denominational, co-educational comprehensive school. The partner primary schools are Calderwood Lodge, Eaglesham Primary, Kirkhill Primary, Maidenhill Primary and Mearns Primary. The headteacher took up post in August 2020. He is supported by six deputy headteachers.

The number of pupils attending the school has increased each year and is expected to continue to rise. Attendance is above national levels and exclusions are below and declining.

In 2024, 5% of pupils were registered for free school meals. In 2024, the number of young people who leave school before S6 was substantially below the national average. In 2024, most young people resided in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) zones seven to ten. In 2024, the school reported that 28% of pupils had additional support needs. This is considerably below national levels.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

excellent

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

- Almost all young people are highly motivated, eager to learn and proud to be members of their school community. They demonstrate the school's values and vision to 'Be Your Best' consistently and enthusiastically in their daily interactions with each other and with staff. Almost all young people approach learning with maturity and confidence. They ask questions readily, seek support when needed and contribute constructively to discussions. Almost all young people support one another skilfully, offering guidance and feedback to peers and recognising mistakes as valuable opportunities to deepen understanding. This highly positive culture empowers almost all learners to take increasing ownership of their progress and to participate actively in shaping their learning.
- The school environment is consistently calm, supportive and purposeful, firmly rooted in the school's charter 'Mearns Respect Matters'. Teachers have created welcoming, well organised and inclusive learning spaces, helping young people to engage fully in learning. Relationships between staff and young people are exceptionally positive and nurturing. All staff are firmly focused on meeting the needs of all learners and this is evident in the day-to-day life of the school community.
- Almost all staff have consistently high expectations for young people. Young people meet these expectations very effectively in terms of their high levels of effort, achievement and behaviour. Young people benefit from consistent routines and strong classroom organisation in all departments. Consequently, almost all young people behave respectfully and politely. Almost all young people are highly motivated and engaged in their learning. They enjoy their learning, talk confidently about their progress and demonstrate resilience and independence. Their motivation is clearly linked to the quality of the learning experiences provided. Almost all learners are confident in taking increasing responsibility for how, when and where they learn.
- Teachers use digital technology effectively to support independent learning in and out of the classroom. Young people are well resourced with the appropriate and accessible digital technology, particularly those who face barriers to learning through equity and additional support needs. Approaches to feedback have been enhanced by digital technology.
- In almost all lessons, learners' experiences are appropriately challenging, enjoyable and relevant. Across all departments, teachers design tasks that promote young people's curiosity, creativity and higher-order thinking skills. Young people regularly engage with learning that is framed in imaginative real-life contexts.

- In almost all classes, teachers plan learning experiences very well. Across almost all classes, teachers communicate the purpose of learning clearly and confidently, providing well-structured explanations, instructions and modelling. They adapt experiences appropriately and provide consistent challenge and support so that learners understand what they are learning, why it matters and how it connects to prior knowledge and skills. This approach enables almost all young people to think critically, apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts and make very strong progress over time. Almost all young people demonstrate a strong understanding of what success looks like and can articulate their own progress, next steps and areas for improvement with increasing confidence and independence. There are also very strong examples in departments of teachers working with young people to co-create success criteria to offer learners more autonomy and ownership of their learning. Teachers align learning carefully to national Benchmarks, National Standards and the development of skills and knowledge. This ensures progression is coherent and appropriately challenging.
- Almost all teachers offer very clear instructions and explanations and use a range of skilful questioning techniques successfully along with well-planned plenaries and constructive feedback. Reflective activities are routinely used to consolidate learning, check understanding and support learners to evaluate their own progress. Most teachers also use challenging questions to prompt young people to think deeply and to use higher-order thinking skills. Teachers adapt learning routinely, based on young people's responses, to maximise learner progress. Almost all teachers identify skilfully when they need to revisit aspects of learning or adopt retrieval practice to support young people's progress in learning. Teachers' responsive planning is a very strong feature of practice. Young people demonstrate a range of important skills for learning at a very high level. These include the ability to analyse and synthesise information successfully and apply their learning in new and different contexts with increasing confidence.
- The school's professional learning culture is a significant strength. Professional learning is strategic, evidence-informed and closely aligned to whole-school priorities. All staff have the opportunity to engage in professional enquiry, moderation, coaching and practitioner research to evaluate impact and continuously refine pedagogy. All teachers have embraced the local authority Collaborative Learning Networks and participate in initiatives such as the Castle Wood Collaborative. In all departments, collegiate dialogue is purposeful and focused on improving outcomes for learners, resulting in increasingly consistent, high-quality practice across departments. Partnerships with external organisations and enquiry projects further strengthen innovation and raise expectations. For example, in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, the Mearns Castle Research Academy launched in 2024. Learning from this model has helped inform whole system improvement. This highly effective model empowers staff to innovate, evaluate impact and continuously refine practice. As a direct result, learning and teaching approaches are consistently refreshed and strengthened, leading to highly engaging, inclusive and ambitious learning experiences for young people. This strong culture of professional curiosity and sustained improvement is demonstrably improving the quality of teaching and securing highly positive outcomes for learners across the school.
- Almost all teachers demonstrate a deep professional understanding of the principles, purposes and aims of assessment. Almost all teachers use formative assessment evidence responsively to adapt teaching approaches and adjust questioning, pace and levels of support to young people. This ensures learning is well matched to young people's understanding and identifies their next steps. Young people receive immediate feedback, appropriate challenge and

targeted support. This helps them engage confidently in learning, viewing mistakes as an expected and valuable part of the learning process. Young people benefit greatly from their teachers routinely using these strategies. Almost all teachers have systematically implemented formative assessment improvement strategies with confidence and skill, supporting learners to be heard, seen and supported at the right level.

- All young people actively engage in meaningful reflection, dialogue and self-evaluation during lessons and planned learner conversations. This is empowering young people to have agency and ownership of their own progress. Through these discussions, almost all young people are developing key skills such as critical thinking, communication and resilience. Young people confidently apply these skills in interactions in classes, across the school and in their wider community.
- There is a strong shared understanding of moderation standards in the broad general education (BGE). Information from primary schools is shared extremely effectively with all departments, supporting a well-planned transition for young people. Primary staff take part in Mearns Castle professional learning and visit lessons which helps strengthen this continuity. Shared approaches to developing and assessing literacy and numeracy help primary and secondary colleagues maintain a common understanding of standards and plan together to ensure clear progression for learners.
- All departments have well established, systematic processes for moderation within departments, and almost all departments work collaboratively across subject groups, and external networks. This supports consistent and useful tracking and monitoring of young people's progress through the BGE. Staff who have experience as Qualifications Scotland assessors and verifiers share their expertise widely in and across departments. This supports all teaching staff to have a clear understanding of standards and expectations in National Qualifications (NQs).
- Teachers' processes for planning, tracking and monitoring are exceptionally coherent and highly effective at classroom, departmental and whole school levels. All staff regularly access robust, relevant and up-to-date information about young people. Almost all teachers use this comprehensive data sensitively and skilfully in conjunction with formative assessment strategies, to plan learning, identify gaps and intervene to support young people who may be off track.
- Senior leaders and department heads have a well-established, sector-leading overview of learners as they progress through the school. At planned points in the session, they engage in very well-considered and detailed discussions to reflect on how well individuals and groups of young people are achieving against their expected levels. This team approach is also embedded at class and department level. Teachers, members of the 'Every Learner Matters' (ELM) and pastoral care teams work exceptionally well together to implement well considered, appropriate and extremely effective additional interventions for young people. This efficient and high-quality communication has a demonstrable and sustained impact on improving progress for 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, 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

excellent

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

BGE

- By the end of S3, almost all young people make excellent progress in literacy and numeracy, including young people who require additional support with their learning. There are robust assessment and moderation processes, underpinned by rigorous tracking of data from primary schools at P7 and throughout the BGE in the secondary stage. This underpins very high levels of consistency in professional judgements.
- In 2024/25, almost all young people achieved Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) fourth level or better in literacy and numeracy by the end of S3.

Senior phase

Leavers

Literacy

- The school is sustaining consistently very high levels of attainment in literacy. Almost all young people who left school achieved Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 5 or better in literacy from 2019/20 to 2023/24, in line with the Virtual Comparator (VC). In the same period, most young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6, significantly higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Numeracy

- Levels of attainment in numeracy are high and show steady improvement from year to year. Most young people who left school achieved SCQF level 5 or better in numeracy from 2019/20 to 2021/22, improving to almost all in 2022/23 and 2023/24, significantly higher than the VC in 2023/24. In the same period, a majority of young people who left school achieved SCQF level 6, significantly higher than the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24 and significantly much higher in 2022/23.

Young people with additional support needs (ASN)

- Staff use data highly effectively to identify young people's needs and to inform appropriate and successful interventions where there are attainment gaps. As a result, the attainment of young people who require additional support shows sustained positive progress. All young people who require additional support left school with SCQF level 4 or better in literacy and SCQF level 3 or better in numeracy in 2023/24. In 2023/24, almost all young people who required additional support achieved SCQF level 5 or better in literacy and numeracy on leaving school. The majority of young people who required additional support achieved SCQF

level 6 in literacy, above the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24. In numeracy, a minority achieved SCQF level 6 in numeracy, considerably above the VC from 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Cohorts

Literacy

- Commendably, young people are consistently attaining at a very high level in literacy at all stages in the senior phase. At S4, almost all young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better between 2020/21 and 2024/25, in line with the VC. By S5, based on the S4 roll, most young people attained SCQF level 6, improving from significantly higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2021/22 to significantly much higher than the VC from 2022/23 to 2024/25. By S6, based on the S4 roll, most young people achieved SCQF level 6, significantly higher than the VC from 2021/22 to 2024/25.

Numeracy

- Young people are consistently attaining at a very high and improving level in numeracy at all stages in the senior phase. At S4, most young people achieved SCQF level 5 or better between 2020/21 and 2021/22, improving to almost all young people between 2022/23 and 2024/25. This is significantly higher than the VC between 2021/22 and 2024/25. By S5 and S6, based on the S4 roll, a majority of young people attained SCQF level 6, significantly much higher than the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.

National Qualifications (NQ) English and mathematics

- Young people's attainment and presentation levels in NQs in English and mathematics at National 5 and Higher level are consistently and substantially above national levels. Top quality passes are notably higher than national levels.

Attainment over time

- Senior and middle leaders, in conjunction with teachers, carry out very well-structured and regular analysis of young people's ongoing attainment data. This supports the highly inclusive and aspirational approach to ensuring all young people have every opportunity to attain. Staff use data to successfully implement a range of skilled and effective interventions. All teachers consider the progress of both individuals and groups of young people. Young people attain increasingly highly as they move through the school.

BGE

- Almost all young people achieve CfE third level by the end of S3. Most achieve CfE fourth level in their chosen curricular areas.

Senior phase

Leavers

- Based on average complementary tariff scores, the lowest attaining 20% of young people achieved significantly much higher outcomes than the VC as they left school in 2022/23 and 2023/24, improving from in line with the VC in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The middle attaining 60% of young people who left school from 2019/20 to 2023/24 sustained levels of achievement significantly higher than the VC. The highest attaining 20% of young people who left school between 2022/23 and 2023/24 achieved in line with the VC.

Cohorts

- Based on average complementary tariff scores, there is a strong picture of attainment for the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people in S4. Overall, they attained significantly higher than the VC from 2021/22 to 2024/25. The achievement of the highest attaining 20% of young people was generally in line with the VC in the same period.
- By S5, using average complementary tariff scores, the attainment of the lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people is significantly much higher or higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. The attainment of the highest attaining 20% of young people is in line with the VC over the same period.
- By S6, there is a very strong picture of improving levels of attainment for all young people. The lowest attaining 20% and middle attaining 60% of young people generally attained significantly much higher than the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25. Over the same period, the highest attaining 20% of young people generally attained significantly higher than the VC.

Breadth and depth

- Young people attained exceptionally well across the senior phase from 2020/21 to 2024/25, with strong and sustained success in NQs. High-quality passes are a notable strength, well above national comparators. There is a wide variety of supportive interventions available to young people in the senior phase, through both universal and targeted approaches. The interventions include the Saturday Café, targeted tutorial periods, one to one sessions, pre-exam 'Gradebooster' sessions and evening study sessions. Attendance at sessions is high and support is provided for those young people for whom transport is a barrier. Young people report increased levels of confidence and senior leaders can demonstrate clear improvements in outcomes for those who attend.
- Senior and middle leaders are developing the range of courses available to all learners through consortium arrangements, working with colleges and within departments. These courses provide young people with more opportunities to achieve, as well as providing progression within subjects. They also support learners to develop a wider range of skills.
- At S4, most young people attained six or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better between 2020/21 to 2024/25, significantly much higher than the VC. A majority achieved eight or more courses at SCQF level 5C or better, significantly much higher than the VC over the same period. A majority of young people achieved five or more courses at SCQF level 5A or better in four of the five years between 2020/21 to 2024/25. This was significantly much higher than the VC over the same period.
- By S5, a majority of young people attained five or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better between 2020/21 to 2024/25, significantly much higher than the VC. A minority of young people achieved five or more courses at SCQF level 6A or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25, significantly higher, or much higher than the VC.
- By S6, a majority of young people attained five or more courses at SCQF level 6C or better between 2020/21 to 2024/25, significantly much higher than the VC. A minority of young people achieved five or more courses at SCQF level 6A or better from 2020/21 to 2024/25, generally significantly much higher than the VC. The percentage of young people gaining three

or more awards at SCQF level 7C or better is generally significantly higher than the VC between 2020/21 and 2024/25. Generally, the percentages of young people gaining one or more to two or more awards at SCQF level 7A has been significantly higher or much higher than the VC from 2020/21 to 2024/25.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Senior leaders have worked very effectively with young people, staff and partners to create a very strong culture of achievement, to 'Be Your Best' at Mearns Castle High School. Almost all young people engage enthusiastically with the outstanding range of clubs and activities on offer across the week. Most of the clubs are led by young people, in partnership with their teachers. These include sports, study, music, arts, science and maths, culture, gaming and debating clubs as well as faith and equality groups. Young people speak confidently about the range of skills, such as collaboration, creativity and resilience, they develop through participation in these activities.
- Young people's participation in activities within the school and their local communities is tracked extremely effectively by senior leaders. The rigorous and detailed tracking informs and highlights non-participation and any potential barriers to participation. Staff and young people work closely together to support alternative options to meet any identified need. Almost all young people engage regularly in wider achievement activities. This is resulting in confident and successful young people who have a strong sense of agency across their school.
- Young people at all stages take on with enthusiasm responsibilities in the pupil parliament, as values captains, as club captains and as SCQF ambassadors. They develop and demonstrate very strong leadership and communication skills in these roles. They are seen as approachable and held in high regard by the school community. Other young people appreciate how their views are collected, considered and then acted on by staff and pupil leaders to improve the school. The invitation to present ideas for how best to spend the Participatory Budget was highlighted by young people as a strong example of being listened to, and included, by the school.
- The well-planned electives programme supports all young people in the senior phase to develop skills for life, learning and work. These achievements are increasingly being captured through a variety of award providers. The majority of young people in S4, for example, gain accreditation for the skills they are developing through this learning. This includes SCQF Level 5 Mental Health and Wellbeing and SCQF Level 4 Enterprise and Employability.
- Strong partnership working, alongside school led programmes, is supporting young people across the school to achieve a range of accredited awards. A minority of young people, in the senior phase, achieve the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, while others gain Saltire Awards, recognising their commitment to volunteering in the school and local community. Young people articulate clearly how these activities are developing their interpersonal and communication skills. Programmes leading to awards in first aid, construction, sport and recreation, personal finance and science, technology and maths (STEM) are ensuring achievement and skills across a range of learning pathways are recognised and celebrated for a few young people.
- Senior leaders and staff are strongly committed to the school vision of promoting and celebrating personal achievement, alongside academic success. Senior leaders work with pupil

leaders to use a range of creative and high-profile approaches to celebrate the achievements of young people. This includes the weekly virtual assembly, which highlights the achievements of those excelling in class and in sporting, cultural and musical activities both in and out of school. Young people are enthusiastic about the approaches used across the school to celebrate achievement and success, from subject based praise cards, merits and house points to the very highly valued school colours system. Young people are proud of their achievements and are highly motivated by the very positive affirmation from staff and senior leaders. Parents speak very highly of the excellent opportunities for achievement offered to their young people.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff maintain a relentless focus on improving young people's attendance at school. Staff have developed a clear strategy through the 'Every Learner Matters' teams to support improved attendance. They monitor and track attendance robustly and work closely with parents to address barriers to regular attendance. For a few young people this involves setting specific targets and celebrating their improvements. Attendance rates are increasing and the small number of young people with persistent absence has been decreasing over the past three years. The school community has a clear shared understanding of the impact attendance has on attainment. A few young people attend school on a part-time basis. Staff ensure that these arrangements are applied appropriately and maintain a focus on returning young people to full-time learning as soon as possible. A few young people with significant barriers to attendance are reengaging and achieving qualifications as a result.
- Senior leaders work very effectively with all staff and pupils to create a culture where everyone is encouraged to achieve and attain. Pupil Equity Funding is used to support key interventions for learners experiencing additional challenges. This includes the highly successful Wellbeing Hub which is used well to support a variety of students and help them to achieve their potential. Young people leaving school, who reside in SIMD deciles four to ten generally achieve significantly higher or much higher than peers from similar backgrounds nationally, based on average complementary tariff scores.
- Staff make highly effective use of tracking data to help understand the attainment and achievement of students facing additional challenges. Staff identify the challenges facing students and agree carefully planned interventions. In addition, senior leaders coordinate a wide range of additional support to enhance the attainment and achievement of learners. The progress and achievement of young people who require additional support are closely monitored and analysed by a variety of staff within the school including the 'Every Learner Matters' team and the Personal Development Team. This targeted focus has resulted in a removal of barriers, improved attendance and increased attainment for pupils in the equity groups.
- Senior leaders have developed a coordinated structure of support called the Mearns Foundation where school staff work with a variety of partners. The Foundation aims to support young people at risk of not achieving and improve the quality of positive destinations. Almost all learners in the targeted groups have achieved additional qualifications.
- A variety of partnerships and interventions ensure that almost all learners consistently move into positive destinations when they leave school, in line with the VC. Staff have identified a variety of pathways and developed a number of school-based vocational courses that help to

develop the skills necessary to sustain positive destinations. This will also be supported by the planned continued development of the Mearns Castle Skills Framework.

Other relevant evidence

- 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 young people. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of young people through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with education and the catering service.
- Young people receive their entitlement to modern languages as part of the Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 approach. They also receive their entitlement to high-quality physical education and religious and moral education.

Practice worth sharing more widely

A well planned and sustained focus on strengthening formative assessment practice has had a significantly positive impact on almost all young people's learning. Young people benefit greatly from their teachers routinely using these strategies. Almost all teachers have systematically implemented formative assessment improvement strategies with confidence and skill, supporting learners to be heard, seen and supported at the right level. Teachers adapt learning routinely, based on young people's responses, to maximise learner progress. Almost all teachers identify skilfully when they need to revisit aspects of learning or adopt retrieval practice to support young people's progress in learning. Teachers' responsive planning is a very strong feature of practice.

The quality of learner conversations. All young people actively engage in reflection, dialogue and self-evaluation during lessons, and planned learner conversations. This is empowering young people to have agency and ownership of their own progress. Through these discussions, almost all young people are developing key skills such as critical thinking, communication and resilience. Young people confidently apply these skills in interactions in classes, across the school and in their wider community.

Use of data. Processes for planning, tracking and monitoring are exceptionally coherent and highly effective at classroom, departmental and whole school levels. All staff regularly access robust, relevant and up to date information about young people. Almost all teachers use this comprehensive data sensitively and skilfully in conjunction with formative assessment strategies, to plan learning, identify gaps and intervene to support young people who may be off track in their learning. Senior and middle leaders have a well-established and sector leading overview of learners as they progress through the school. At planned points in the session, they engage in very well-considered and detailed discussions to reflect on how well individuals and groups of young people are achieving against their expected levels. This team approach is also embedded at class and department level, where teachers, members of the 'Every Learner Matters' (ELM) and pastoral care teams work exceptionally well together to implement well considered, appropriate and extremely effective additional interventions for young people. This efficient and high-quality communication has a demonstrable and sustained impact on improving progress for young people.

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.