HMIE | Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland

Summarised inspection findings

Sgoil an Taobh Siar

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

18 August 2026

Key contextual information

Sgoil an Taobh Siar is a Gàidhlig status sgoil serving the rural areas of Ballantrushal, Borve, Galson, Melbost Borve, Shader, Barvas and Brue. The sgoil - school offers learning through English and Gàidhlig - Gaelic.

The headteacher has been in post for 15 years. An executive headteacher supports Sgoil An Taobh Siar as part of the strategic structure of the local authority. The leadership team comprises a principal teacher and a nursery manager. A temporary additional principal teacher is part of the leadership team until August 2026. The nursery manager is registered with the Care Inspectorate, with the headteacher having overall responsibility for the sgoil-àraich - nursery.

At the time of the inspection, the bun-sgoil roll was 78 children, 52 of whom are in Gàidhlig Medium Education. There are five classes in total, three of which are for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Children in English Medium learn Gàidhlig as an additional language. To recognise this, classes in English Medium are called Gaelic (Learners). In September 2024, the headteacher reported that approximately 22% of the roll, required additional support with their learning and development.

Across the sgoil, all children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile 5.

In September 2024, 7% of P6-7 pupils were registered for free school meals.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar operate a Gàidhlig First Policy for all of their sgoiltean-àraich. It is assumed that all children will continue with Gàidhlig Medium Education into P1. Standard enrolment arrangements are still available for parents.

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	

- Across the sgoil, children experience a warm, nurturing and welcoming culture. Staff and children's relationships are positive and supportive. Almost all children exemplify consistently the sgoil values of onair – honesty, modh – manners, coibhneas - kindness and urram-respect. Staff refer regularly to the values and recognise and celebrate children who display these. They do this through class and star awards, as well as during assemblies. Children are motivated by having their work and achievements displayed and celebrated in classrooms and throughout the sgoil. This results in children's behaviour being of a very high standard. Children learn about their rights, but this is not yet a strong feature of practice. Teachers should raise children's awareness of rights, particularly those associated with children's Indigenous language and culture.

© Crown Copyright

- Children learn in well-organised and purposeful classrooms. Recently, staff evaluated learning environments to make classrooms even more inclusive. Almost all children participate well and engage in lessons. Children demonstrate increased motivation when tasks are varied and well matched to their needs and interests. Teachers should ensure children's learning is delivered at an appropriate pace, with increased challenge to meet the needs of all learners.

- The Comhairle's Gàidhlig First Policy is impacting across the sgoil. It supports a strong and rich Gàidhlig culture. Children and staff demonstrate pride in their language, culture and identity as a Gàidhlig community. In Gàidhlig Medium Education, children's learning is based on high-quality total immersion. This is supported effectively by a high proportion of fluent staff understanding the importance of immersion. Gàidhlig is seen and heard throughout the sgoil. When children require corrections to language, all staff do so sensitively. Children in Gàidhlig Medium Education should be encouraged to be more independent in socialising more in Gàidhlig out with the classroom. Staff should continue to ensure they maintain consistently high expectations of children's use of Gàidhlig across all contexts.

- Across the sgoil, teachers' instructions and explanations are clear. In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning and explain how children will know when they are successful in their learning. As a result, almost all children know and can articulate the purpose of their learning. The headteacher should support staff to enable children to co-construct steps to success, while strengthening ownership and understanding of learning.

- Across the sgoil, almost all teachers provide clear and detailed instructions that help children to understand how to complete successfully their tasks. Almost all teachers link children's activities to prior learning effectively. They use questioning well to check for understanding and to clarify teaching points. Teachers should now extend their use of higher-order questioning to deepen thinking and challenge children consistently in their learning.

- In most lessons, teachers provide an effective range of teaching approaches, which include teaching, collaborative activities and independent learning. Support staff interact well with individuals and small groups of children to enhance their learning and engagement. In most lessons, teachers support children who require additional help in their learning positively. However, at times, teachers over direct learning. This slows the pace of learning. Teachers should ensure that tasks are set at the right level of difficulty and the pace of learning meets the needs of all children.

- Teachers are at the early stages of implementing a play-based approach to learning at the early level. The headteacher and teachers should now engage further with national practice guidance, including the 'Advice on Gaelic Education'. They should develop a clearer shared understanding of high-quality play pedagogy, including for total immersion and regular interactions in Gàidhlig. They need to ensure that play experiences are purposeful, appropriately challenging and link more effectively to planned learning.

- Teachers use a range of digital technology effectively to access and enhance learning. Older children use digital skills to produce a termly whole-school newsletter through their 'media club.' Children use digital technology confidently to support research. Older children successfully support younger peers to share their learning online with their parents. As a result, children develop digital literacy skills, using technology responsibly and purposefully. Recently,

© Crown Copyright

older children produced an insightful short film in Gàidhlig on the future impact of artificial intelligence. Children have a keen knowledge of how technology can assist them.

- All children engage in a few purposeful outdoor learning activities. This supports their engagement and enjoyment of learning. They grow food, with each class responsible for a different area of the school grounds. Older children engaged in a transition programme with other local primary schools. This was based on learning relevant to the local context. Children talk enthusiastically about these experiences. Teachers should develop a clear and progressive outdoor learning pathway. They should ensure that all children have regular access to well-planned and meaningful outdoor learning experiences. Staff should develop further the learning, teaching and assessment policy to include what constitutes high-quality outdoor learning and total immersion.

- Teachers access a progressive plan to structure the teaching of Gaelic (Learners). Children in Gaelic (Learners) have daily routines in Gàidhlig and participate in opportunities, such as the Mòd. Children's learning of Gàidhlig as an additional language needs to focus more on intentional planning for progress, using Gàidhlig for communication. Staff should develop children's skills in connecting all of their learning of Gàidhlig to be more fluent and independent in talking Gàidhlig. They should be aiming for children to achieve Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) second level by the end of P7.

- Teachers provide children with a range of verbal and written feedback to improve the quality of their learning. Children self- and peer-assess aspects of their work. They have very recently begun to set personal targets in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff should now support children to develop independent skills in knowing when they have achieved their targets.

- Teachers plan learning over short-, medium- and long-term. They are beginning to use the new local authority progression pathways to plan learning experiences in a more thorough way. They work collegiately to support their judgements of children's progress towards an achievement of CfE levels. Teachers engage in moderation activities with colleagues in sgoil and with local sgoiltean - schools. This is helping to support accurate teacher judgements in literacy and numeracy. They should continue to moderate listening and talking.

- The headteacher has recently developed an assessment strategy which outlines when key assessments and tests will take place across the sgoil year. This has yet to be fully embedded. The headteacher should ensure the strategy is effective by involving staff fully in its rollout. Staff should contribute to the development of the strategy, understand clearly expectations and engage in professional dialogue about its use. Teachers use effectively a range of formative and summative assessment approaches to evaluate how well children learn. Teachers should continue to strengthen the use of high-quality assessments to ensure children can apply and demonstrate their learning across the curriculum and in a wider range of contexts.

- The headteacher and teachers meet four times per year to discuss planning and to check children's progress in literacy and numeracy through Gàidhlig and English. They have begun to use the local authority tracking tool to record assessment data. Teachers should monitor

© Crown Copyright

children's progress in Gaelic (Learners). They should ensure that checking this progress and assessment is an integral, ongoing part of planned learning and informs teaching.

- The headteacher and teachers know children's needs and challenges very well. This enables them to plan interventions and support effectively any individual who may need extra help or who has gaps in their learning. The headteacher and teachers should now develop further their use of assessment data. Teachers should increase planning to support children capable of achieving even more to better meet their needs.

© Crown Copyright

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

© Crown Copyright

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	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

- At the time of the inspection, the sgoil roll comprised a small number of children in particular stages. As a result, attainment and progress is summarised in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy through Gàidhlig and English

- Attainment in literacy and English, literacy and Gàidhlig and in numeracy and mathematics is good. Overall, most children attain nationally expected levels. Staff should increase their expectations of a higher proportion of children achieving beyond expected levels. Most children who receive additional support for their learning in literacy and numeracy are making appropriate progress.

Attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig and, as appropriate to immersion, literacy and English in Gàidhlig Medium Education

- Most children attain nationally expected levels in literacy, through Gàidhlig and English. Children's attainment is similar by P7 in literacy and Gàidhlig and literacy and English. This meets the national objective of equal competency in Gàidhlig and English by the end of P7. Children's acquired fluency enables them to use Gàidhlig confidently as the language in which to learn across the curriculum.

Listening and Talking

- All children use Gàidhlig very well in their learning through total immersion. Across stages, children talk confidently to adults and in small groups. Children take turns respectfully and interact in a timely way to maintain conversations. They express fluently their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Younger children do so increasingly through Gàidhlig. Older children communicate confidently and sustain more complex conversations where they justify a viewpoint in Gàidhlig. Positively, all children apply their listening and talking skills in Mòd competitions and in working in groups, for example assemblies led by children. Teachers should encourage children to avoid using English words in their communication through Gàidhlig when in more spontaneous situations.

Reading

- Younger children understand basic sounds and phonics, and identify objects related to sounds in Gàidhlig. Most children read with fluency, understanding and expression using appropriate pace and tone. Teachers should ensure children are secure and confident in reading Gàidhlig before increasing time spent reading in English. Children would benefit from greater access to

© Crown Copyright

a range of texts in Gàidhlig and to enjoy its culture. Older children analyse well a few reasons why they enjoy reading. They should continue evaluating texts using a wider range of authors' techniques.

Writing

- Younger children form their letters accurately. They would benefit from developing greater independence in their writing. Care should be taken to ensure that support is appropriately scaffolded and gradually reduced, enabling them to take increasing ownership of their work.

- As children progress through stages, they write for a variety of purposes. Most older children write fluently and in detail. They should check their own work for common spelling errors, use of accents and grammar.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics in Gàidhlig Medium Education

- Overall, most children achieve nationally expected levels in numeracy and mathematics. Children use Gàidhlig mathematical terminology fluently. At all stages, children would benefit from opportunities to apply their skills in real-life contexts.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children work confidently with numbers, counting forwards and backwards. They add and subtract accurately within 10. Older children add and subtract three-digit numbers correctly. They would benefit from revising multiplying by 10 and 100. As children progress through the sgoil, they are confident in converting fractions, percentages and decimals. They are less confident in rounding to nearest decimal place.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children continue a simple pattern with colour or shape. As children progress, they identify and describe accurately a variety of two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. Older children show a good understanding of angles and work out complementary angles correctly.

Information handling

- Younger children use tally marks appropriately to record information they have gathered. Across the sgoil, children collect, organise and present data accurately. They use bar graphs and other simple data-handling approaches well. Children should now have opportunities to use digital technology to develop further their data handling skills.

Attainment in literacy and English in English Medium Education

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English. A few children are capable of achieving at a quicker rate of progress.

Listening and talking

- Children demonstrate and apply their listening and talking skills well across the curriculum. This includes occasions through Gàidhlig, such as the local Mòd. They present well in English at pupil-led community events and assemblies, and participation in drama productions. Children address with confidence to a range of audiences. Younger children share their thoughts and ideas with enthusiasm. They demonstrate their understanding when answering questions and listen well to adults and peers. Older children contribute ideas and listen well

© Crown Copyright

for information from a range of sources. They justify their opinions and build on the ideas of others. Children should continue to apply and extend their knowledge and skills in literacy.

Reading

- Children enjoy celebrating reading books and stories through a recent school-wide reading week. Younger children retell familiar stories and talk about different characters. They use their increasing knowledge of sounds and patterns to read and understand words. Younger children should continue to learn and practise a range of reading strategies. Older children explore different genres of books and create reviews to recommend those they enjoy. They continue to build on their fluency and expression. They demonstrate their understanding of texts and give appropriate answers to a range of questions. Older children should continue to develop and apply their reading skills across the curriculum.

Writing

- Across classes, children write successfully for a variety of purposes across genres, such as reports, fact files, poetry, letters and imaginative stories. Children attempt to include different connectives and interesting vocabulary in their writing, appropriate to their age and stage. A few younger children should practise further forming lowercase and uppercase letters correctly. Younger children should write their own short texts independently more regularly. Older children are beginning to apply their knowledge of figurative language and add more descriptive detail in their writing to engage their reader. Older children should continue developing skills in reviewing and editing their own writing to ensure it is technically accurate.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics in English Medium Education

- Most children make good progress from prior levels of learning in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Most children have a sound understanding of number appropriate to their age and stage. Younger children identify, recognise and recall numbers to 20. They solve money problems and recognise coins up to £2. Most older children confidently solve calculations with three-and four-digit numbers and use different strategies to find solutions. Older children should now continue to strengthen their understanding of equivalent forms of simple fractions and how to calculate fractions of a quantity accurately.

- Most children would benefit from more variety and challenge in their numeracy work. They should have further opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in real-life, relevant and problem-solving contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children name and identify common 2D shapes and complete patterns in a sequence. Most younger children create symmetrical pictures and identify symmetry in patterns, pictures and nature. They understand, and use accurately, positional language including above, below, under and on. Older children identify and classify 2D shapes and 3D objects. Most older children measure and draw angles accurately. They use compass points and angles to describe and follow directions. Children should have more opportunities to apply their skills in shape, position and movement in the outdoors and other meaningful ways.

© Crown Copyright

Information handling

- Most younger children match and sort items based on differences, such as shape and colour. They develop their awareness of language associated with displays for a given purpose, such as pictograms or simple bar graphs. Older children develop well skills in presenting information in tables and using digital devices. Across the sgoil, children would benefit from further opportunities to develop their data handling skills using a range of charts, diagrams and graphs. Older children should develop the language of probability to describe the likelihood of simple events occurring.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher and staff gather and analyse a range of information which helps them understand children's attainment in Gàidhlig and English Medium classes. Over time, children build well on their attainment as they move through the sgoil. Staff demonstrate the positive incremental progress of children who receive additional support with their learning. The headteacher and staff identified writing and mathematics as areas of improvement for the sgoil. They have established new approaches to learning and teaching that impact positively on children's outcomes. For example, there has been an increase in the quality of children's writing. Children build their skills across a wider range of mathematics. As planned, the headteacher and staff should accelerate further children's progress to raise attainment even more.

- The headteacher monitors attendance regularly and thoroughly. She follows local authority procedures. She identifies quickly any patterns of absence. The sgoil's overall attendance average is 94%. There has been a steady increase in attendance figures over the last three years. Currently, a small minority of children have attendance below 90%. This is mostly as a result of minor illnesses. When children have low attendance, or are experiencing difficulties with attending sgoil, staff work closely with children and families. They plan and provide personalised packages of support. Senior leaders manage these bespoke arrangements well and in line with local and national guidance. The sgoil's approaches help to improve children's attendance.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children develop and demonstrate a range of skills, such as collaboration, leadership, creativity and communication. They do so through an extensive range of high-quality experiences. This is an important strength of the sgoil. Many children's achievements consolidate deeply Gàidhlig language and culture. Children achieve success and often achieve recognition or awards in the local Mòd, Dileab an t-Siorraidh – debating competition, sports and music festivals and Gàidhlig short film competition. Older children display leadership skills and empathy through roles, such as buddies, house captains and sports leads. They also demonstrate resilience and independence through outdoor learning, such as the recent 'Siuthad!' P7 transition programme. Across the sgoil, all children benefit from working with specialist instructors, community partners and wider community members, including through the medium of Gàidhlig. High-quality achievement experiences contribute significantly to supporting children to develop important skills for learning, life and work.

- Children are proud of their own and others' achievements, including those of adults in the sgoil. They share and talk about achievements in sgoil and from home life. All children value and celebrate all achievements thoughtfully through assemblies, displays, newsletters and

© Crown Copyright

social media. Children also work very well together and with staff to achieve nationally accredited awards for their sgoil. For example, they have received recognition for rights-based learning and sport. Staff track children's participation in achievement activities and clubs. They use this information well to support any children at risk of missing out. The headteacher and staff should now support children to identify and discuss the skills they demonstrate through their achievements.

Equity for all learner

- The headteacher and staff have a deep understanding of the context of the sgoil and local rural community. They know children and their families very well. Senior leaders and staff identify gaps in learning or wellbeing for children who face barriers or disadvantage. They use a range of information well to plan and provide universal and targeted interventions. The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) appropriately to support this work. Staff evaluate the interventions they provide effectively. Evidence shows these have a positive impact on outcomes for children, such as readiness to learn, emotional wellbeing and progress in learning. Senior leaders and staff should continue to reflect on universal and targeted supports to ensure they select the most effective approaches and interventions. This should include involving children and parents in meaningful ways on how PEF is used.

- Staff consider and address equity of opportunity, such as transport support and social experiences. All children choose from a wide range of clubs and activities. Staff provide a Friday breakfast club at no cost to families, support with school uniform and clothing, and subsidise excursions as required. Children and staff often provide families and local foodbanks with fruit and vegetables grown and harvested in their polytunnel. Parents appreciate the sensitive and compassionate approach from staff and children feel included and well-supported.

© Crown Copyright

Other information

- Across the school, children receive their entitlement to learning Gàidhlig and Gaelic (Learners) as part of the 1+2 languages programme. Older children learn French in addition to Gàidhlig, Gaelic (Learners) and English.

- Children take part in physical education, religious education and observance, receiving their entitlement in line with national expectations.

- The headteacher and staff achieve positive outcomes towards the 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education,' 2017. Staff are increasing the numbers choosing Gàidhlig Medium Education. This is due to the comhairle's Gàidhlig first policy. Parents choose Gàidhlig Medium Education in the bun-sgoil having seen children's good progress in learning Gàidhlig in sgoil-àraich. All children in English Medium Education learn Gaelic (Learners) as their first additional language. Across all classes, all children learn with a range of local and Gàidhlig partners to support their learning. All children take part in national and local language and cultural events. They all participate in a range of competitions for the local Mòd, including music and song, poetry recitation, drama and through two choirs. The headteacher has recruited staff very well so that staff contribute fluently to immersion. They should ensure that their handbook captures the actual curriculum for Gàidhlig Medium and Learner Education, bilingualism and immersion. The headteacher should ensure that Gàidhlig and Immersion Education is a consistently strong feature of strategic and annual planning for improvement. Senior leaders should refer to the 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017' in taking Gàidhlig forward.

© Crown Copyright

Practice worth sharing more widely

Overtime, all children in Gàidhlig and English Medium Education, take part in at least one competition at the local Mòd. Children participate in solo singing, one of two choirs, bàrdachd-poetry recitation and drama. These experiences help children develop Gàidhlig fluency, confidence, creativity, collaboration and strong performance skills. This is while preparing children to present confidently to a range of audiences. Staff support this effectively through regular practice and meaningful opportunities to perform at pre-Mòd cèilidhs, assemblies, community events and in class. In doing so, staff link language and culture very effectively as part of the school's unique curriculum offer. Children develop a pride in their Gàidhlig identity and heritage. Staff model writing skills by authoring drama scripts for children to perform at the Mòd. Children see how ideas and storylines are crafted for performance and audience engagement.

© Crown Copyright

Explanation of terms of quantity

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

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

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

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.

© Crown Copyright