

Summarised inspection findings

Bun-sgoil Mhalaig – Mallaig Primary School

The Highland Council

12 May 2026

Key contextual information

Bun-sgoil Mhalaig – Mallaig Primary School serves the rural village of Mallaig. The bun-sgoil – primary school offers learning through English and Gàidhlig. It is a designated bun-sgoil for Gàidhlig Medium Education, overlaying most of the catchment area for Mallaig High School. The exception is the small isles and Knoydart. The bun-sgoil has a different catchment area for English Medium Education, covering the village of Mallaig, and neighbouring area of Morar and Arisaig.

The headteacher has been in post since 2024. Prior to this, they held the post on an interim capacity. The post of headteacher is for the cluster of Mallaig High and Primary Schools, as well as other primary schools in the area. The headteacher is supported by a deputy headteacher, whose remit is also for the cluster of primary schools. The deputy headteacher is registered as the Nursery Manager with the Care Inspectorate and has responsibility for the sgoil-àraich - nursery class in English and Gàidhlig.

Bun-sgoil Mhalaig – Mallaig Primary School has a principal teacher, who teaches for three days a week. Their remit includes Gàidhlig, across the cluster.

At the time of the inspection, the bun-sgoil roll was 51 children. Children were organised in two classes for each medium of learning. In September 2024, the headteacher reports that approximately 43% of the roll, required additional support with their learning and development.

Across the bun-sgoil, about a third of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile 6, with the majority residing in decile 7.

In September 2024, no P6-7 pupils were registered for free school meals.

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	

- Across English and Gàidhlig Medium, children experience a welcoming, caring and inclusive culture. Staff know children and their families well. They use this knowledge to advance children’s education. Most children talk confidently about the bun-sgoil values and are beginning to understand how these shape daily life. Staff and children should continue to embed further the values and support children’s rights across the bun-sgoil. This will help them create a consistently calm and clear environment that is conducive to all children’s purposeful learning.
- Almost all children benefit from nurturing relationships with staff. Across the bun-sgoil, most children are respectful to each other and behave well. Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) offer sensitive and discrete support to children whose behaviour may become dysregulated. This

minimises quickly disruption to learning. Staff now need to ensure a more consistent whole-school approach to promoting high expectations and standards of behaviour.

- In most lessons, children learn effectively through a range of motivating activities. These activities include whole-class discussions, group work and individual tasks. Most children listen and engage well with activities that are matched well to children's needs and interests. However, a few children become disengaged and passive in their learning when activities lack appropriate challenge, or when the pace of learning is too slow. Senior leaders should guide staff on how to increase a few children's engagement in activities.
- Children who require additional support with their learning and development benefit from planned weekly specialised teaching inputs. These are prioritised to meet targets in support plans. A specialist teacher is also available to advise staff in their role to support additional support needs. For the majority of time, staff ensure that children who require additional help with their learning are supported well. For a few children, activities within whole-class approaches should be more tightly focused on identified needs.
- In Gàidhlig Medium Education, children are immersed very well through teachers' very fluent use of Gàidhlig. Children are proud and confident speakers of Gàidhlig. Teachers use a range of strong approaches to support children's immersion and accuracy in using the language. All children understand Gàidhlig as the language of the classroom and learning. Almost all children use very effectively extended communication in Gàidhlig with specialised vocabulary. All children speak Gàidhlig in class to their teachers, friends and in taking forward small group activities. Children are motivated by rewards, such as 'Duais na Gàidhlig' that recognise their use of the language. Staff should increase further the proportion of immersion in line with the 'Advice on Gaelic Education', 2022. This would support children's fluency even further given that their time in bun-sgoil is their main way of using Gàidhlig.
- Across English and Gàidhlig Medium, teachers generally explain new knowledge effectively and give clear instructions. For the majority of the time, teachers share effectively the purpose of learning and how children can be successful. As a next step, children should be more involved in identifying steps towards how they will be successful in their learning. This will assist in continuing to personalise learning to the needs of children. Teachers use questioning well to check for understanding. Children learning through Gàidhlig respond well to a wide range of questions to extend their thinking. More of the strong practice in Gàidhlig Medium should be shared across the bun-sgoil, while recognising where approaches to learning are different.
- Across English and Gàidhlig Medium, almost all teachers use interactive boards to support learning and record children's contributions. Children use digital devices well to reinforce learning through games, undertake research and to capture evidence of their learning. For example, older children describe how digital technology supports them complete surveys and present data. Teachers should continue to plan further children's use of technology to enhance learning, creativity and digital skills.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no children in P1 Gàidhlig Medium Education. Across the bun-sgoil, teachers are at the initial stage of implementing a high-quality play-based approach to learning in P1. Staff should engage with national guidance and identified effective practice to develop quality play environment, experiences and regular interactions. More of

the strong practice in sgoil-àraich and nursery should be shared across P1, while ensuring progression in learning.

- Across English and Gàidhlig Medium, teachers make good use of the community as a place of learning. Children learn about the local environment and sustainability. They benefit from a range of experiences, as well as extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. They have music lessons with professional musicians in the community, tutors and Fèisean Òigridh na Mara. Senior leaders recently introduced plans to develop the use of outdoor learning to enhance children's experiences across the bun-sgoil. Staff should develop a skills pathway ensuring outdoor learning is planned well, coherent and embedded in children's learning experiences.
- Moving forward, senior leaders should have a clear policy on expectations for high-quality learning and teaching in English and Gàidhlig Medium. This should include immersion approaches and the use of Gaelic (Learners) to strengthen whole-school approaches to immersion. Senior leaders should give clear advice and feedback to staff to secure greater consistency in high-quality approaches.
- Across English and Gàidhlig Medium, children benefit from a few opportunities to use self- and peer-assessment. This is not yet consistent in all classes. Staff provide opportunities for older children to set personal targets. Children would benefit from more frequent and specific feedback to support their understanding of what they are doing well and their next steps in learning.
- Teachers use an annual assessment calendar that outlines useful expectations for assessment. They use a range of formative, summative and standardised assessments to monitor children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders and teachers use this information to identify children who require support to meet national expectations. Staff should continue building a shared understanding of the principles, purposes and aims of a wider range of assessment. Children engage in a substantial number of activities to develop their talking. These should be used to assess and moderate listening and talking as an important language skill. Staff should strengthen their approaches to ensure that assessment is used more effectively to inform their planning of learning. This includes planning learning activities for children who require more challenge in their learning and progress.
- Staff participate in moderation activities within the bun-sgoil and across the cluster. These experiences are valued by staff for setting and confirming standards. Most recently, moderation has focused on writing. Teachers should continue to engage in regular high-quality moderation activities, both within and beyond the bun-sgoil. This should support teachers to develop further their knowledge of national standards in numeracy, extending out to other areas of the curriculum.
- Teachers plan well children's learning using a range of timescales and a full range of curriculum pathways. They use these pathways appropriately to inform the planning process. Moving forward, teachers need to use assessment information more effectively to inform planning for groups and individuals. This should help to ensure tasks and activities are planned at the right level of difficulty for each child.

- Senior leaders and teachers meet termly to discuss children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders have recently improved their systems for tracking and monitoring children's progress. They identify effectively gaps and plan appropriate interventions for children. This includes identifying children who are capable of attaining higher, for whom additional challenge is required. The headteacher should continue to support staff in using tracking information more effectively to ensure all children make the best possible progress in their learning.

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.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

The bun-sgoil roll comprises small numbers of children at each stage. Because of this, standards of attainment and progress are expressed in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups.

- Most children in Gàidhlig Medium Education attain age-appropriate national standards in listening, talking and reading. The majority of children attain age-appropriate levels in writing. The bun-sgoil adds value to children's learning of Gàidhlig as a new language year by year. Children's acquired fluency enables them to use Gàidhlig as the language in which to learn across the curriculum. Attainment in literacy through Gàidhlig and English is good.
- The majority of children in English Medium Education attain age-appropriate national standards across reading, writing, and listening and talking. Attainment in literacy through English is satisfactory. Across English and Gàidhlig children should continue developing their writing skills more regularly and for an increased variety of genre. Almost all children should be supported to improve the presentation of their written work.
- The majority of children in English and Gàidhlig Medium Education attain age-appropriate national standards in numeracy and mathematics. By P7, most children in English and Gàidhlig Medium Education attain national standards in numeracy and mathematics. Attainment in numeracy and mathematics through English and Gàidhlig is good.
- Most children who require additional support with learning make good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig, and as appropriate English

Listening and talking

- Across stages, almost all children have high levels of fluency in Gàidhlig and English. They use Gàidhlig in a range of learning and social occasions. They engage very well with Gàidhlig as the language of learning within the classroom. They are confident with a wide range of specialised terms in Gàidhlig. Children at the first level need further support with their use of English in Gàidhlig communication on a few occasions. Across levels, most children have a high level of accuracy in grammar, with only a few areas to improve. Most children sustain conversations in Gàidhlig when working more independently of the teacher, for example in paired activities. By

P7, almost all children sustain audience interest effectively as they perform at events such as the Mòd.

Reading

- By P7, all children read texts well and with expression in Gàidhlig and English. A few children across first level have had an intensive focus to increase their understanding of phonics. This is improving children's skills in decoding unfamiliar text in Gàidhlig. By second level, children describe well the purpose of key features of an interesting book.

Writing

- Across stages, most children author Gàidhlig text capably. By the end of the first level, only a few children write to expected level. Children in P4 improve their writing through targeted support. By second level, children's writing is fluent in Gàidhlig and English. As a next step, children should continue writing in a range of genres and with increased accuracy in spelling.

Attainment in literacy and English in English Medium Education

Listening and Talking

- The majority of younger children are beginning to take turns and more confidently express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Across first level, the majority of children develop communication skills well by working in pairs and small groups. At second level, most children increasingly articulate their communication using more complex vocabulary. They offer opinions, build on the ideas of others and develop well debating skills.

Reading

- The majority of younger children attempt to sound out and blend letters. They understand features of text such as title and author. At first level, most children select and listen to texts, and explain their preferences. The majority of children are beginning to read with increasing expression and fluency. They recall facts about the text and predict what might happen next. At second level, most children read with fluency, understanding and expression using appropriate pace and tone. The majority of children are developing inferential reading skills. Across the bun-sgoil, all children should increase their reading of a range genre so that they can develop their love of reading.

Writing

- Younger children are beginning to write independently and punctuate short sentences correctly. They use capital letters and full stops at the start and end of a sentence. At first level, the majority of children develop descriptive writing. They are beginning to use a variety of sentence starters. Most children need to develop strategies when spelling unfamiliar words. At second level, most children use paragraphs to separate thoughts and ideas. They are beginning to use grammar and writing techniques to engage the reader. This includes alliteration and onomatopoeia.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

Numeracy and mathematics in Gàidhlig Medium Education

Number, money and measure

- At first level, children confidently add three-digit numbers. They add 10 and 100 to a given number. They would benefit from further revision of rounding to nearest 10 and 100. They identify correctly money to pay for items but were not able to give change from £10. At second

level, children use confidently mental strategies to add and subtract. They identify correctly equivalent fractions. They are not yet confident in finding fractions of a whole number.

Shape, position and movement

- Across levels, children identify and name two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. They describe properties and shapes appropriate to their level. At first level, children identify lines of symmetry in shapes. Children are not yet working confidently with right angles or compass points. At second level, children name accurately a range of angles. They are not yet confident in identifying missing angles, such as supplementary and complementary angles.

Information handling

- Across stages, children identify a range of ways to present data. Younger children use bar graphs to display information. They would benefit from investigating other ways of displaying information, for example using Venn diagrams. Older children describe how they use technology to display their data from class surveys.

Numeracy and mathematics in English Medium Education

Number, money and measure

- At early level, children count and give numbers before and after. They add and subtract confidently within 10. Children are not yet confident with time. At first level, children use place value accurately for numbers up to 1000. Children have quick recall of times tables facts. They are not yet confident in adding or subtracting three-digit numbers. They identify correctly money to pay for items and identify ways to pay other than cash. At second level, children confidently round numbers to nearest 10, 100 and 1000, and round to two decimal places. Children complete accurately multi-step problems and explain their thinking. They would benefit from further revision of multiplying decimals.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, children continue a pattern based on shape or colour. Children identify 2D shapes but are to name 3D objects. At first level, children name 2D shapes and 3D objects. Children do not yet identify the properties of the 3D objects. At second level, children calculate accurately the diameter when given the radius. Children identified a range of angles correctly.

Information handling

- At early level, children interpret a simple pictograph. At first level, children identify key information from a simple bar graph. At both early and first levels, children would benefit from developing further data handling skills, including through real-life contexts. At second level, children use the language of probability to describe the likelihood of events occurring.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders monitor and analyse well children's attainment and progress in literacy and numeracy through Gàidhlig and English. Staff and senior leaders use information on progress to deliver universal and targeted interventions. As children move through the bun-sgoil, their attainment varies and improves again in P7. Staff are addressing important gaps in the first level across Gàidhlig and English Medium Education. All staff should continue to focus on sustaining improvements for children in literacy, numeracy and assessing across a wider breadth of subjects.

- The bun-sgoil's average attendance figure is in line with the national average. At the time of the inspection, children's average attendance was 93%. Currently, a few children have attendance below 90%. Senior leaders work well with staff and partners to support children who show a pattern of absence. They plan and provide personalised support. Occasionally, parents request flexible timetables to assist children who require additional support with their development. Parents work with the local authority in reaching this agreement. There are no cases of exclusion. Senior leaders should continue to work with families to ensure that all children maximise their attendance at bun-sgoil.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- In English and Gàidhlig Medium Education, the overall quality of children's achievements is an important strength. Almost all children develop a high standard of skills and knowledge from taking part in a programme of achievements for sports, music, language and culture. These develop children's confidence, fluency and sense of being important members of a Gàidhlig community. Children's participation in opportunities for achievements is tracked. Staff should ensure that children's resultant skills and attributes, from these opportunities, are also recognised with children and increased from year to year.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of the different ways that socio-economic challenges may manifest in a rural area. Senior leaders and staff should develop a clearer approach on how they monitor the costs associated with learning in and beyond the bun-sgoil. They should be clearer on how parents may access support in a discrete way.
- Senior leaders have developed clear plans for using Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Additional staffing is deployed to provide targeted interventions for literacy and numeracy. There is some narrowing of the attainment gap in literacy and numeracy. As a next step, teachers should track even more thoroughly the effectiveness of all targeted interventions being used with children. This will support staff to identify which interventions are having the greatest impact in raising attainment. They should seek the views of parents and children on how PEF is used. Senior leaders source other fundings to support children with trips.

Other relevant Information

- 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 children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider. Children experience two hours of physical education weekly.
- All children in English Medium Education learn French at P1, and Gaelic (Learners) at P5. All children in Gàidhlig Medium Education learn Gàidhlig at P1, English at P4, and French from P5. Across the bun-sgoil, children enjoy and take part in Gàidhlig language and cultural events. These include the local and national Mòd, as well as Seachdain na Gàidhlig – World Gaelic Week. Senior leaders should consider introducing Gaelic (Learners) earlier. This is to take more account of the bun-sgoil's designated status for Gàidhlig immersion across the cluster. This would assist with meeting duties in the 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.' Children in English Medium Education should make more accelerated progress in learning Gàidhlig.
- Children benefit from Religious and Moral Education and religious observance. Teachers follow guidance from The Highland Council.
- The bun-sgoil handbook should be clearer on how parents enrol children into Gàidhlig Medium Education. Senior leaders, staff and children should ensure that the handbook details the benefits of Gàidhlig Medium Education, bilingualism, immersion and the curriculum offer. There is capacity for the numbers in Gàidhlig Medium Education to be higher. Senior leaders should refer to the 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017' in taking Gàidhlig forward.
- Stakeholders raised some concerns regarding cluster leadership arrangements. The local authority should continue to engage with stakeholders.

Explanation of terms of quantity

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

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.