

Summarised inspection findings

Pilrig Park School

The City of Edinburgh Council

7 October 2025

Key contextual information

Pilrig Park School is a non-denominational school in Leith, Edinburgh. The school supports secondary-aged young people with a range and complexity of additional support needs from across City of Edinburgh Council. The school has a number of classrooms and general-purpose spaces, a hall, a library and a multi-sensory room.

The school roll is currently 63. Thirty percent of young people live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two. Forty percent of learners have free school meal entitlement. There are nine classes with class groups predominantly based on young people's school stage. There is a class at each stage from S1 – S6 with two classes at S2 and S5. The maximum class size is eight pupils. The extended leadership team (ELT) comprises the headteacher, deputy headteacher and three principal teachers. The headteacher has been in post for almost four years. In addition to the management structure, there are 13 teachers (12.8 fte) and 19 pupil support assistants (PSAs). The school has subject specialist teachers for art, home economics, music and physical education.

There have been significant staffing changes within the team over the past two years, with a high number of PSAs being recently recruited to the staff team.

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

- Under the strong strategic leadership of the headteacher, staff have successfully established a welcoming, caring and purposeful learning environment across the school. They have embedded a nurturing school culture which is underpinned by children's rights and the school vision and values. Young people benefit from positive relationships with adults and each other. They feel safe and cared for and enjoy learning. Young people are proud of their personal achievements and being part of the Pilrig Park School community.
- Across the school, almost all young people are motivated to learn. Most engage purposefully in learning experiences, often for extended periods of time. Staff use well a shared framework for learning and teaching to provide familiar routines and structured learning activities for young people. This includes a well-balanced combination of practical tasks and desk-based activities. Most learning activities are teacher led. Staff should continue to provide support for young people, appropriate to their individual needs, to benefit from opportunities to learn independently and work collaboratively with their peers. Staff support young people very well to transition smoothly between activities and classes. Most respond well to any planned changes. The school would benefit from outdoor spaces being updated and enhanced to maximise the learning environments available for young people.
- In most lessons, teachers plan and use differentiated learning activities and success criteria well. They provide most young people with stimulating tasks and activities set at the

appropriate level of difficulty. A minority of young people are not challenged sufficiently in their learning. At times, learners quickly complete tasks and activities that are too easy. This often results in these young people waiting for others to complete tasks whilst not being engaged in meaningful learning. Staff need to ensure that all young people are sufficiently challenged at all times, offering extended learning that builds on their prior learning.

- Staff are highly attuned to the needs of young people and support them well to make positive choices. They plan together in class teams effectively to agree how best to support the wellbeing needs of young people, including when young people become anxious or dysregulated. Most staff anticipate very well when young people are at risk of becoming dysregulated or exhibiting challenging behaviour. They adopt successfully a range of creative strategies to help young people regulate their emotions and behaviour. Staff intervene carefully and sensitively. Most interventions are well timed, including the effective use of alternative activities, movement breaks or time away from classes. As a result, most young people consistently reengage with their learning quickly.
- Staff record any instances of challenging behaviour using the school's well-established wellbeing concern forms. They carefully consider any immediate actions required to support young people. A few young people, due to their significant additional needs, are particularly challenging at times which can result in injury to themselves or others. Senior and middle leaders should review their processes for monitoring wellbeing concern forms. This will help them to identify any patterns of young people's behaviour that may require a different approach to meet their needs more fully.
- Teachers and PSAs work effectively as teams in classes and across the whole school. Most PSAs are skilled at supporting young people to engage with their learning experiences. They are particularly adept at encouraging young people to remain focused on learning activities. Teachers and PSAs plan together high-quality activities for young people during breaks and lunch. Young people very much value and enjoy participating in activities including football and dancing. A minority of PSAs would benefit from clearer direction from teachers. This will help them to provide young people with sufficient thinking time to complete tasks successfully before intervening with further support.
- In most lessons, teachers use a range of effective teaching strategies to help young people to understand the purpose of their learning and how they can be successful. They use well timed praise, provide helpful feedback and ask appropriate questions. In line with the school improvement priority, most teachers are embedding the effective use of plenaries into their practice. Senior leaders should continue to work closely with all teachers to build on this emerging strong practice and establish consistent high-quality feedback across the whole school.
- Across the school, staff use visual timetables, signing and objects well to support young people's understanding of routines and learning activities. Young people respond well to the structure this provides to the school day. Most young people can communicate and express their views effectively using common signs. The school has recently gained an award for its work on digital technology. In most classes, staff use digital technology to support young people's understanding. As planned, staff should continue to develop their use of digital technology with an increased focus on supporting young people to use digital devices more independently. Staff should continue to work closely with associated health partners to enhance further the positive practice in the use of augmentative assistive communication for identified young people. This would support these learners to make choices and contribute more fully during learning activities.

- Senior leaders are now recording assessment data more systematically. They are reviewing this useful information to help measure the progress that learners are making. Staff approaches to tracking and monitoring are more developed than quality assurance processes. Senior leaders should continue to refine their quality assurance processes to identify more readily learners who are not making expected progress. This will enable staff to plan interventions more effectively and maximise progress for a few young people.
- Staff are continuing to develop well their approaches to assessment. Teachers are assessing regularly young people's progress across the curriculum at the broad general education (BGE) and at the senior phase. Staff have collaborated well to reflect on and enhance assessment approaches used in the classroom. Most teachers employ agreed strategies such as using aided language boards to support questioning and to check for understanding. They are using these approaches to improve the structure of lessons and develop a shared understanding of assessment. Senior leaders have correctly identified that staff would benefit from support to enhance consistency and embed these approaches further. Senior leaders should continue with plans to share effective practice through peer lesson observations and by building further partnerships with other special schools.
- Senior leaders are improving approaches to moderation. They have developed a position paper to support better staff's understanding of the moderation cycle. Senior leaders have developed a clear rationale which details the school's approaches to ensure teacher judgements are reliable. Teachers moderate termly. Staff have well-established processes to support moderation in the senior phase and in verifying achievements accredited by external providers. As a next step, staff should strengthen further moderation at the BGE. They could do so by engaging with partner schools to increase staff confidence in their professional judgements of National Milestones and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.
- Staff plan well using a range of formats to identify young people's next steps in learning. They have worked together to agree the use of consistent planning formats at both the BGE and senior phase. All learners have a relevant individualised education plan (IEP) which sets out personal targets. Staff share all targets with young people, parents and professional partners. All learners have an annual young person's planning meetings. Teachers use class overview sheets to detail learner progress, individual learning needs and classroom strategies. They update overview sheets regularly. In addition, staff use forward plans effectively to identify young people's next steps in learning. Senior leaders recognise the need to improve planning approaches to provide a clearer focus on individual targets identified in IEPs. This could make more explicit how these targets link to the curriculum and the progress that young people are expected to make.
- Senior leaders track progress across the curriculum through the gathering of rich data. They have developed a BGE tracker to help provide useful information on the profiles of learners. The tracker details the progress young people are making in their communication, levels of engagement and in the curriculum. Staff are using the senior phase tracker to provide comprehensive overviews of achievement and attainment. As a result, staff can identify more easily the progress that learners are making. Teachers now have a greater understanding of expected progress as young people move from the BGE to the senior phase.

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

very 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

- Overall, most young people are making good progress in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics in comparison to their prior levels of attainment. A few learners are making very good progress. A few young people could achieve more.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most young people are making good progress in literacy and English. They are attaining and working within pre-early level milestones, early level and first level of CfE. The majority of young people are making very good progress in their listening, talking and communication.

Listening and talking

- Young people working at pre-early level milestones use symbols and concrete materials to make choices in response to a visual stimulus, for example on a digital display. At early level, learners engage with stories very well and re-enact stories including with props. At first level, young people listen and respond appropriately, using techniques such as eye contact. They are adding expression to their communication very well. Staff should continue to build further on their successful approaches to communication and, as planned, enhance the use of signed communication to support learners.

Reading

- At the pre-early level milestones, learners show interest in stories that are read to them and identify familiar characters. At early level, almost all young people engage well with familiar texts and show clear enjoyment as they watch and listen to stories. Learners at first level read an increasing number of common words or key words related to a familiar topic. Staff should continue to embed approaches to promoting reading across the school by ensuring that reading activities are appropriately differentiated according to individual need.

Writing

- Almost all young people at the pre-early level National Milestones use symbols well to create short pieces of writing. For example, they identify the sequence of tasks, know what has been completed and what they will do next. At early level, learners form most lower case letters legibly and use spaces between words. Young people at first level are writing with increasing independence and use appropriate punctuation, such as capital letters and full stops. At first level, young people could develop further their writing skills with increased independence.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most young people are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few are making very good progress. A few young people require increased levels of challenge.

Number, money and measure

- At all levels, most young people are able to follow a sequence of events confidently using their visual timetables. Young people working at National Milestones show an awareness of the sequence of numbers to five and terms such as bigger and smaller. At early level, most young people are using measurement skills in real-life activities such as baking. Most young people engage with money through life skills such as shopping in the local supermarket. At first level, most young people complete calculations successfully using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. At all stages, young people could strengthen their use of time particularly in real-life situations.

Shape, position and movement

- At all stages, young people engage well with positional language and concepts of movement, speed and direction. At early level, most young people match objects and shapes by colour and size. At first level, young people are increasingly identifying the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. At all levels, young people need to continue to explore and identify the properties of shape in real-life situations.

Information handling

- At early level, most young people are developing their skills in interpreting simple pictorial displays to gather information and identify patterns. At first level, most young people are building confidence in displaying information using bar charts and tables. They should apply their information handling skills further using a greater variety of diagrams. At all stages, young people should use digital technology more to develop their information handling skills.

Attainment over time

- Most young people at the BGE are attaining very well over time across all areas of the curriculum. Senior leaders have developed effective approaches to tracking progress. They are data rich. Senior leaders are tracking attainment from P7 onwards and are monitoring progress well as young people move through the BGE into the senior phase. Staff are developing further their approaches to monitoring data to evaluate progress systematically and develop stronger progression pathways. This strategic use of data is increasingly tracking the progress that individual learners and cohorts have been making over time and is supporting learners to accelerate progress. Senior leaders should now continue to analyse further data to identify patterns of attainment over time.
- Most young people in the senior phase are making very good progress in attainment over time across the curriculum since 2022. Attainment over time is improving significantly across the school year on year. Most young people are attaining national qualifications and awards at higher levels than before and across a wider number of curricular areas. They are gaining an extensive range of qualifications. Young people are benefitting very well from an enhanced curricular offer that has led to a stronger profile of National Qualifications. The widened curricular offer has provided improved breadth and depth throughout the senior phase. There are significant improvements in young people's attainment over time. Young people are gaining more qualifications, including a greater number of full course awards. For example, all young people are achieving qualifications for personal and social education; relationships, sexual health and parenthood; and life skills. Young people are gaining accreditation in subjects such as English, mathematics, art and home economics. Young people this session are projected to achieve an increased number of qualifications and awards at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework levels one to five.
- Young people are benefitting from well-developed processes to monitor their attendance. Staff have improved young people's attendance through the school's accurate recording and planned interventions. The current school attendance is 91.28%. Attendance in recent years is

in line with the national average. A few learners are below 90% attendance, and the school has supported families and young people to improve attendance by planning personalised interventions. A few young people attend on a part-time basis as an appropriate strategy to improve attendance following significant periods of interrupted learning. Part-time timetables are reviewed regularly and have been used successfully to help reengage those young people. As a result, these young people are improving their attendance and benefitting from increased time in school. There are clear planned steps for young people to move into full-time education.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- All young people enjoy celebrating their successes at class, whole-school and community levels. Staff have created a highly positive culture where both small and significant achievements are recognised and valued. This is underpinned by a very strong whole school focus on attainment and personal development. Staff, parents, and partners share in the pride of young people's accomplishments through regular newsletters, open afternoons, and ongoing communication with families.
- All learners are supported very well to experience success through an extensive personal achievement programme. At the BGE, all young people gain accreditation through awards which develop very well their skills for life and learning. Young people are becoming increasingly confident in developing communication with less familiar adults as a result. At the senior phase, learners extend their achievements through participating in high quality programmes that prepare them for independent living. They are enhancing their social communication skills, functional life skills, and resilience very well. Senior leaders monitor very well young people's participation in these activities to ensure all learners are involved and included. As a next step, senior leaders should continue to expand the number of community learning experiences out with the school environment for all young people at the BGE.
- Young people benefit greatly by participating in activities to promote pupil voice. They are building very well their citizenship, mentoring and leadership skills. Learners are increasingly confident, willing to take on responsibility, and contribute meaningfully to their school and wider community. As a result, young people have achieved a number of awards relating to their work for the environment, sport, horticulture and for their role in respecting the rights of young people. Young people have gained awards at local authority level for their work on promoting a positive identity for those with additional support needs. At a national level, learners have been commended for their work on anti-racism at a recent conference.

Equity for all learners

- Led effectively by senior leaders, staff have developed a very strong culture of equity and inclusion across the school. They have implemented very well targeted interventions to ensure that learners, particularly those facing socio-economic challenges, have access to meaningful learning experiences. The school's commitment to reducing barriers is evident in its use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to support pupils affected by poverty. Senior leaders can evidence that there is no poverty-related attainment gap at the senior phase. Senior leaders and staff promote initiatives such as breakfast provision to help ensure young people are ready to learn each day. They provide bespoke transport support for families when required.
- Senior leaders use PEF very well for targeted interventions. These include skills for work for young people at risk of disengaging from school or moving into a negative post-school destination. Staff also use this approach very well to provide enhanced support for care-experienced learners and those young people at risk of disadvantage through poverty. This enhanced support enables these learners to achieve additional qualifications and build confidence. These qualifications relate to vocational opportunities provided by partners such as developing cookery and food handling skills in a real-life working environment. Young people

are gaining knowledge of the expectations of the world of work and are benefitting from developing further their social and communication skills in a less-familiar context. Across the school, staff closely track and monitor the impact of equity interventions. They maintain detailed records and use this information very well to analyse young people's progress and engagement. Senior leaders review this data to reflect on individual progress and to plan further interventions, if required.

- Staff work closely with parents, carers and partners and host events to encourage participation and strengthen home-school partnerships. Parents value these events very highly and speak positively of the impact of sharing experiences with each other. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for young people's success. Staff collaborate effectively with external partners to provide tailored pathways and sustained support for learners at risk of disengagement. These partnerships often extend beyond the school environment, helping young people transition successfully into positive destinations. This has supported all young people since 2022 to move onto a sustained positive post-school destination.

Other relevant evidence

- Young people at the BGE are gaining appropriate learning experiences in relation to developing their understanding of modern languages. All learners are developing further their knowledge of signed communication. Young people also learn about other languages during the school's celebrations of different cultures.
- All young people at the BGE are receiving their entitlement to religious education.
- Young people are benefitting from access to a well-resourced school library. Staff have also developed well links with a local library and have supported the local library to develop the use of communication boards.
- 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. Areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.