

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's Episcopal Primary School

Stirling Council

31 March 2026

Key contextual information

St Mary's Episcopal Primary School is a denominational primary school serving the area of Dunblane. The school is accessed through placing requests only. At the time of inspection, the school roll consisted of 21 children working across two multi-composite classes. The substantive headteacher has been in post since 2018. At the time of the inspection an interim headteacher has been in post on a dual headship basis since October 2025. They have been full time in the school for one month prior to the inspection. The interim headteacher is supported by a deputising class teacher. In addition, the local authority has been providing additional support to the school.

A few children are registered for free school meals. Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 6 to 10. The school currently receives no Pupil Equity Funding. The school reported that 68% of children require additional support with their learning. Just under 10% of children have English as an additional language.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak
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 school, all staff have created a nurturing ethos underpinned by positive relationships between staff and children. Almost all children feel that staff and other children treat them with respect. Children are polite and well-mannered. Staff create welcoming, attractive environments that support children to learn. They now provide calm spaces within and out with the classroom for children who may need quiet time. These spaces help children regulate their emotions successfully.
- Teachers support children to develop class charters that set out shared expectations and rights. With guidance from the interim headteacher, children have also led plans to improve the playground environment, introducing clear rules to promote respectful play. Together, these actions have improved behaviour across the school. Children now consistently meet the school's high expectations across all areas of school life. Children say that the school helps them to understand and respect others, creating a calm, happy and inclusive environment.
- Working closely with the interim headteacher, staff have taken steps to increase engagement in learning by adapting resources to reflect better children's interests. For example, they use wizard-themed activities to introduce new letter sounds. Staff also provide opportunities for children to learn on their own, in pairs and in groups. These approaches support the majority of children to engage more positively in their learning. However, a lack of sufficient pace in

lessons is restricting progress and preventing children from achieving as well as they could. Staff need to ensure lessons consistently move at a brisker pace to achieve more ambitious outcomes for children.

- Teachers have recently introduced child led learning across different areas of the curriculum to better reflect children's interests. Children decide on the context for these topics and use a 'big questions' approach to support what, and how, they want to learn. This is beginning to improve children's engagement in their learning. All children feel comfortable approaching staff with questions or suggestions. Children welcome these opportunities to lead the context of their learning. As they improve their use of curricular planners and understanding of national expectations for children at different stages, teachers should embed children's voice and interests in planning learning. This should help children begin to take increased ownership of learning experiences.
- In the majority of lessons staff take appropriate account of children's development within multi-stage classes by providing different learning activities for different stages. However, a minority of children do not experience sufficient challenge. Although teachers have recently engaged in local authority professional learning to improve how they plan for children's differing needs, this is not yet applied consistently in practice. They should use this professional learning more effectively to provide learning experiences that are consistently set at the right level of difficulty. In addition, teachers should raise expectations of what children are capable of achieving to increase pace of children's progress.
- In the majority of lessons teachers share with children what they are learning and how to be successful. However, teachers do not consistently refer to the intended learning and steps to success throughout lessons. As a result, a minority of children do not use them to support or improve their work. In most lessons, teachers use questioning well to support children's recall and understanding of tasks. Teachers do not routinely build on children's answers to promote deeper thinking. The interim headteacher has rightly identified the need to further develop high-quality approaches to learning. Teachers should continue to engage with professional learning to develop approaches that strengthen the quality and consistency of learning and teaching. This professional learning should support teachers to develop a stronger understanding of the key features of effective practice through research, professional reading and observations of highly effective practice in other schools.
- Teaching staff provide children with helpful verbal feedback during lessons that helps them clarify their understanding. The majority of children use a thumbs up approach to inform teaching staff of their understanding of set tasks. Teachers are increasingly highlighting children's work in different colours to identify what has been done well and where improvements are needed. As this approach develops, staff should ensure that their written feedback provides children with the understanding of why they have been successful and how they can improve their work.
- Staff are developing their approaches to play pedagogy for younger children. They create attractive environments that support adult-directed playful learning well. Staff should engage further with national guidance to support a better balance between adult-led, child-led and

child-initiated play. They should ensure they provide children with more purposeful play experiences that promote clearer progression in learning.

- All staff use interactive whiteboards well to support whole class lessons. Children across the school use digital technologies to support their learning effectively. Older children develop their digital skills by regularly using a digital platform to access and submit learning tasks. A few children use assistive technologies to support their engagement with learning. Staff should make greater use of the digital progression pathways to develop children's digital skills progressively and in line with national expectations.
- Staff are at an early stage of encouraging children to learn outdoors. There is potential to develop children's outdoor learning skills using the school grounds and the local area. As a next step, teachers should plan and timetable regular outdoor learning opportunities across the curriculum to ensure children benefit from structured and progressive learning experiences beyond the classroom.
- Teachers carry out a broad range of assessments with children and are beginning to develop their understanding of high-quality assessment. However, there are significant weaknesses and inconsistencies in how staff use assessment information to understand children's progress and identify their next steps. The interim headteacher has correctly identified the need for a more strategic and consistent approach to assessment to support staff in understanding children's progress. Teachers now need to use assessments more rigorously to identify specific gaps in learning and address these gaps. Teachers should support this through developing a deeper understanding of national standards.
- Teachers plan learning over different timescales, including long- and short-term. They use a range of curriculum learning pathways linked to Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes, including those developed by the local authority, to inform their planning. Teachers plan most areas of the curriculum through topic work. They should review this approach to reduce repetition and ensure appropriate breadth and depth of curriculum knowledge. This should ensure that gaps in learning are identified and addressed systematically.
- Staff plan supports to meet children's needs, including those who require additional support with their learning. However, this support is not sufficiently coordinated and does not consistently lead to appropriate progress in learning. The headteacher should support staff to work collectively to assess, plan and deliver support for children. They should ensure that support and interventions are implemented as soon as gaps in learning are identified, to prevent these gaps from widening. In addition, the staff should continue with plans to work closely with the local authority to introduce more robust planning for children who require additional support with their learning. This planning should include clear, measurable and time-bound targets to improve outcomes for children.
- Since taking up post, the interim headteacher has introduced a new local authority tracking and monitoring toolkit. Staff are now beginning to track the progress of all children on a termly basis in literacy and numeracy. This has the potential to strengthen their understanding of children's progress over time against national standards.

2.1 Safeguarding

- Following the inspection the education authority, working with the school setting, have taken forward areas for improvement in safeguarding which required urgent action. HM Inspectors have reviewed information relating to these areas for improvement. HM Inspectors are satisfied with the response taken by the education authority and do not require any further information.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

- As this is a small school with two multi-stage composite classes, general statements about progress have been used to ensure children's anonymity.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is below the national average. A minority of children make satisfactory progress in literacy. The majority of children make satisfactory progress in numeracy. A minority of children could make stronger progress in literacy. A few children could make stronger progress in numeracy.
- A minority of children who require additional support with their learning are making appropriate progress in literacy and numeracy. A majority of children would benefit from higher expectations and a faster pace of progress.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, the majority of children make satisfactory progress in listening and talking. A majority of children make insufficient progress in reading and writing.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, the majority of children listen well during class and group discussions. Younger children answer teachers' questions appropriately. A few children require support to follow staff instructions. The majority of older children build on each other's ideas by asking questions or offering suggestions during small group discussions. A minority of older children require more opportunities to contribute to class discussions. These conversations need to be managed carefully by the class teacher to allow all children to develop stronger discussion skills through active participation.

Reading

- The majority of younger children answer simple questions well about books they are reading. They are beginning to develop the skills needed to help them read unfamiliar words. For the majority of children, the pace of developing reading skills is too slow. Staff should now review their programmes for developing early reading skills. The majority of older children explain well what type of books they like to read. A minority of children read clearly and use expression

well to enhance their reading skills. Older children need to develop a clearer understand of author's techniques that keep the reader interested.

Writing

- The majority of younger children write their own names well. A minority are beginning to write simple words independently. A few are beginning to write simple sentences with support. The majority of older children create sentences using similes and onomatopoeia. They are beginning to use these to make their writing more interesting. Across the school, children need to engage more frequently in independent extended writing to build their writing skills further.
- Older children need more explicit teaching of spelling rules to support their understanding and accuracy. Too many children who require support with their learning are overly reliant on staff scribing texts for them. They should now be supported to develop strategies to enable them to write with increasing confidence and greater independence.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make satisfactory progress from prior levels of attainment in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are capable of achieving more.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children recognise numbers to 20 and count forwards and backwards within 20 confidently. They continue and create simple patterns using colour well. They are less confident identifying coins above the value of 20p. As children progress through the school, they identify accurately the place value of digits within numbers to a 1000 and use zero as a place holder correctly. Children round a three-digit number to the nearest ten or hundred accurately. Older children are not able to read and interpret analogue clocks reliably in line with their age and stage.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children recognise and describe common two-dimensional shapes and their properties well. They understand and use the language of position and direction, for example above, below and in front. Older children accurately place and name the points on a four-point compass. Across the school, children are less secure in identifying 3D objects' properties appropriate to their age and stage.

Information handling

- Children at early level use knowledge of colour, shape, size and other properties to match and sort items in different ways well. Older children collect data successfully using tally marks and answer simple questions successfully. They are not yet confident in presenting this data in various graphs, including digitally.

Attainment over time

- Last session, the average attendance was 93.6%. This was above the national attendance figure. The interim headteacher tracks attendance effectively. They work well with families, in line with local authority guidance, to provide support to improve children's attendance at school. These interventions are having a positive impact on the attendance of individual children. The headteacher should continue this important work. Where part-time timetables

are used, appropriate plans are in place. This has resulted in an increase in the amount of time children spend in school.

- The interim headteacher recognises that teachers' professional judgements are not yet fully robust or reliable. Teachers should engage further in moderation activities to understand the wide range of evidence required to demonstrate accurately children's achievement of a level. In addition, the data currently used to monitor attainment over time does not enable staff to show progress effectively, due to very small pupil numbers and reductions in the school roll. The interim headteacher has supported staff recently to begin to use the helpful local authority tracker. The headteacher should support staff to improve the analysis of assessment information over time. Staff should develop a clearer focus on evidencing how they are measuring and improving children's progress. This has the potential to strengthen staff's understanding of individual children's attainment in literacy and numeracy as they progress through the school.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff celebrate children's wider achievements both in and outside school. Children enthusiastically talk about their achievements and are proud to have these displayed in the newly introduced 'achievement trees'. Staff track carefully and accurately children's participation in clubs, groups and activities to ensure no child misses out.
- Staff work well with volunteers and partners to support a wide range of experiences. All children benefit from taster sessions from Active Stirling and a few children are learning to code. Children regularly visit the Dunblane Memory Cafe to engage with members of the community. This helps children to recognise their role as responsible citizens. In addition, all children have recently begun a national skills-building programme. Children undertake practical challenges such as cooking, sewing and time management to earn badges and certificates. Staff should continue to embed these learning opportunities to support children to develop greater independence, confidence and resilience.
- The interim headteacher has established house captains to take forward important leadership roles across the school. Children take pride in these roles. Older children value being a role model for and supporting younger children. This approach helps children to develop leadership skills and contributes positively to their sense of achievement. In addition, the interim headteacher recently worked with children to identify additional child-led leadership roles. Although these roles are yet to be implemented, the process has already strengthened pupils' sense of voice and involvement in school development. This approach supports children in developing leadership skills and contributes positively to their sense of achievement.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know the context of their school well. Staff are sensitive in supporting families to reduce the cost of the school day. For example, the school provides uniforms for those who need them and resources to support children in accessing the full curriculum.
- Working with the local authority, staff have recently reflected on the progress of boys and girls, children who have experienced care and those affected by poverty. This analysis of data is at an early stage. The headteacher should continue to work with teachers to deepen their

understanding of the inequalities children face and how these impact on learning. In addition, staff should more rigorously evaluate the impact of targeted interventions and class-based supports to ensure they effectively address these inequities.

Other relevant evidence

- Children receive two hours of physical education (PE) each week. This takes place in the local church hall. Teachers should make effective use of the local authority PE programme to ensure the consistent delivery of high-quality physical education and to support the progressive development of a wide range of skills.
- Children across the school learn French. Staff should now ensure children receive their entitlement to 1+2 languages in line with national policy.
- Children are receiving their entitlement to religious education and observance in line with national expectations. Children are visited by the local clergy on a regular basis and attend services in the local church.
- 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.

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.