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

Summarised inspection findings

St Columba's RC School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

17 November 2026

Key contextual information

St Columba's RC Primary School is a denominational school situated in Annan in Dumfries and Galloway. At the time of the inspection there were 43 children on the school roll, organised into two classes. The headteacher and principal teacher have both been in post for eight years. During the inspection, an acting headteacher was in post. She was supported by the principal teacher and two quality improvement officers from the local authority.

Just under 60% of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation decile 2, with almost all children living within deciles 2-6. Over 50% of children are registered for free school meals. Across the school, 56% of children have an identified support need. A few children have English as an additional language and over half of children sit within one or more of the Scottish Government six priority groupings. Just over 80% of children are placing requests within the school.

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	

- School leaders and staff have developed a calm and inclusive ethos where all children are welcomed and valued. Across the school, there are highly positive and trusted relationships between children and staff. Staff have a deep knowledge of children and their families. They place their commitment to their faith at the heart of their work. They value children and their individual personalities and talents. Staff centre nurturing approaches and the rights of the child in their practice. They provide well-timed support to individuals when they require help to settle and engage positively with their learning. They have high expectations of children's behaviour and use positive reinforcement and praise very well to engage children in their learning and highlight good choices. Children are proud of their school and welcoming to visitors.

- Staff have developed engaging, purposeful and literacy-rich learning environments that meet the needs of most children in multi-stage classes. They use spaces very well to allow children to develop independence, work collaboratively and take responsibility for their learning. In lessons, teachers plan carefully different groupings and resources for most children. This includes planning a balance of independent, paired and group working. Teachers plan effectively regular opportunities for children to demonstrate their learning through independent tasks. This ensures that teachers gather regularly information about children's understanding and progress. Most teachers plan well direct instruction to individuals and groups. Teachers should now consider how to increase the pace of lesson introductions to maximise children's learning time. This should also support a minority of children to experience increased challenge in their learning and remain engaged throughout the lesson.

 © Crown Copyright

- The leadership team have led very effectively collaborative approaches between teachers and cluster colleagues to develop a well-considered learning and teaching policy. This supports teachers to understand clearly the standards and expectation of classroom practice, planning across a multi-stage class and what quality assessment looks like. This policy should provide effective support to new teachers who join the school, ensuring children experience consistency as they move through the stages. Teachers also refer to 'A St Columba's Lesson' which provides an overview of the key features of effective lessons. As a result, most teachers weave prior learning and a focus on skills well throughout lessons. In most lessons, teachers use questions effectively to check children's understanding. In a few highly effective examples, teachers use a wide range of questioning approaches to provide opportunities for children to justify their answers and think more deeply about their learning.

- This session, teachers are developing an approach to team teaching to provide increased direct teaching to groups in literacy and numeracy. They should now consider how to use this approach as a professional learning opportunity. School leaders should now consider how to reorganise this additional teaching support to share best practice and embed the key features of the learning and teaching policy across the team. This should support all children to experience consistently high-quality approaches to learning and teaching.

- All teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. They use visual timetables and consistent communication approaches to ensure all children are clear on classroom expectations. All teachers use the clear lesson structure to share the purpose of each learning episode. In the best examples, teachers use interesting and relevant hooks to motivate children who are excited to carry out learning tasks. In a few highly effective examples, teachers pose questions and scenarios to support children to think more deeply about their learning. Teachers provide quality written feedback to children about their work in writing. They should continue to build on this approach across the curriculum to ensure children understand what they are doing well and be clearer on their next steps in learning.

- Skilled support staff work very well with teachers to assist small groups and individuals where required. They are attuned to the needs of children and provide well-timed support to help children engage positively in their learning. Support staff use professional learning effectively to deliver appropriate interventions for children in literacy and numeracy. They use research-based approaches to help children revise and consolidate key concepts. The support they provide is having a positive impact on children's engagement and progress in literacy and numeracy.

- Teachers plan regular opportunities for children to use digital technologies to support their learning. For example, children use apps and online games to reinforce key concepts. Teachers track children's progress in a few mathematical applications which adds to their assessment of children's understanding of their learning. Children are building digital skills through opportunities to code and present information online.

- Teachers plan well using long-, medium- and short-term planning. They developed progressive planners that ensure children in multi-stage classes experience new learning each year, within a broad range of contexts. Teachers should now ensure weekly timetables plan a more balanced coverage of curricular areas. Children would benefit from regular exposure to discrete teaching of curricular areas. For example, children benefit from learning progressively French from P1 to P7 and Spanish in P5 to P7. Teachers have recently introduced topics that

 © Crown Copyright

connect learning across different curricular areas. Children enjoy sharing their ideas on topic plans and feel staff value and act on their opinions. Teachers should continue to embed this approach, supporting children to make meaningful decisions about their learning. This should include planning opportunities for children to apply their knowledge and skills in different contexts.

- The leadership team are proactive in developing professional partnerships with local schools. This is supporting teachers very effectively to develop a stronger understanding of national standards. They work with colleagues to moderate assessment opportunities and the evidence they use to verify children's achievement of a level. Cluster and partnership moderation has also enhanced staff confidence in assessing reading with professional judgements about children's progress becoming increasingly accurate.

- Staff have developed a robust annual assessment calendar that ensures children have regular opportunities to showcase their knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy. Teachers use this information very well to analyse children's progress, identify gaps in learning and plan interventions to increase children's progress. They gather robust pre- and post-assessment data which helps them analyse the progress children make. Teachers use assessment information effectively with children to set individual targets in literacy and numeracy. These are revisited regularly with children to support them to make increased progress and close attainment gaps. Children talk knowledgeably about their targets and what they need to do to improve. Teachers also track children's progress across other curricular areas. This is beginning to help teachers plan children's learning more effectively across the curriculum to meet the needs of children at different stages. Teachers should continue to gather evidence of children's progress across the curriculum to support them to plan appropriate key learning for children at different stages.

© 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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

© Crown Copyright

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion	good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Led very ably by school leaders, almost all staff have a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children and families. Staff have a strong understanding of their local community and the individual wellbeing needs of children. School leaders use a wide range of data, such as community health trends and patterns to shape the school's approach. Staff place the dignity of children at the centre of their practice. Their interactions are supportive and nurturing whilst maintaining high expectations of behaviour. As a result, relationships across the school are highly positive and children have a strong sense of belonging to the St Columba's family.

- Staff create a climate where children feel safe and secure. Teachers model appropriate social cues and ensure each child is welcomed warmly and individually at the beginning of each day. Children talk confidently about their work in recent years on understanding their emotions, wellbeing and the rights of all children. They feel that this has helped to ensure their school is a calm and safe place to be. Children use the language of wellbeing to describe their feelings and identify strategies from their 'strategy toolkit' to manage their 'big' emotions. Children talk articulately about healthy food choices and relate their experiences in their pupil groups, for example, when preparing and cooking healthy soup.

- School leaders gather important data about children's wellbeing regularly. Teachers use termly surveys to collate children's views about their individual wellbeing. With school leaders, teachers analyse this information and use the data gathered very effectively to plan support and interventions for individuals. Staff have a one-to-one conversation with children, involving them fully in the planning process. As a result, almost all children feel valued, listened to and well supported. They talk enthusiastically about how respectful staff are towards them and how positively this makes them feel. Staff should now continue to support the minority of children who are unsure how their views are acted upon to make changes at the school.

- Staff and partners are responsive to the wellbeing of each child. They work collaboratively to support children's individual needs. Staff are proactive at seeking advice to plan appropriate and bespoke targets and strategies to meet children's wellbeing needs. Staff engage in regular professional learning to ensure they are up to date with current educational practice. Children recognise the impact of this work and talk about the improved relationships between children in the playground and classrooms. They discuss that opportunities for community and intergenerational projects have improved their confidence in tackling new experiences.

- Staff monitor carefully the opportunities children have to participate in out of school activities and take steps to widen their experiences. Staff and partners encourage active travel to

 © Crown Copyright

school. Children access scooters and helmets to increase their physical activity at home and use these to travel to school. Staff ensure cost is not a barrier for families. As a result, children who otherwise would not be able to attend clubs, trips and excursions access freely these experiences alongside their peers.

- The leadership team and staff analyse and use a range of data effectively to inform planning of both targeted and universal interventions. Children benefit from an extensive range of support. For example, groups of children receive tailored support from active schools' staff which is helping to improve their fitness and health. Support staff link with psychological services to provide bespoke wellbeing support to identified children using amenities in the local area. Children articulate well how participating in these groups helps to build their self-esteem and talk about their wellbeing.

- Staff use the outdoor spaces very well to enhance children's learning experiences. The regular opportunities for outdoor learning, play and exercise using high-quality equipment in the playground benefits greatly children's emotional and physical wellbeing. Staff involve parents and the Parent Council in playground improvements such as the engaging school bus and the new toys and playground equipment. Children have regular opportunities to showcase a wide range of skills and talents such as musical and sustainable living. They link learning on life cycles to real-life experiences and take risks, work collaboratively and make decisions.

- School leaders and staff comply fully with statutory requirements. They ensure approaches to planning, record keeping and chronologies reflect national guidance and best practice. School leaders have established effective approaches to monitoring and improving children's attendance. This includes strong partnership working with other agencies, including the attendance team. They work closely with parents and partners which is improving steadily the attendance and reducing late coming of identified children.

- Across the school, most children have a sound understanding of children's rights and the rights of others. Most children feel confident discussing the rights which are important to them. They speak knowledgably about children in other parts of the world who may not experience their rights. Children are developing their understanding of being a global citizen and how their actions can impact positively on others. Children have gained national accreditation for their work on rights and are proud of this achievement.

- The principal teacher is proactive in ensuring curricular learning is relevant to children and the community. This includes when learning about diversity and inclusion. She uses data and her knowledge of the community very effectively to tailor learning to develop children's understanding of discrimination and help them think critically about information they may see online. Using real-life contexts, children's rights and a focus on critical thinking skills, most children are developing a greater understanding of the world in which they live, using evidence to challenge discrimination. Children have an increased understanding of difference, relationships and the wider world in which they live through staff's well-considered annual planner. Children experience cultural events, learn about relationships and difference and develop a better understanding of world religions through This is Our Faith, God's Loving Plan and through reading texts which supports learning around diversity, equalities and inclusion. Staff should continue to develop this practice progressively at all stages to support all children to continue to understand how their actions can impact others.

© Crown Copyright

Other relevant evidence

- Overall attendance for academic session 2025-26 was 89%. This is below the national average. In the previous three-year period, attendance was consistently in line with the national average. The leadership team follow local and national guidance on improving attendance and are proactive in supporting families to get children into school and reduce late coming. The leadership team work with a range of partners to address poor patterns of attendance, with evidence of improved attendance from the few children who have persistent absence of less than 90%.

© 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