

Summarised inspection findings

Harmeny Education Trust

Balerno

18 November 2025

Key contextual information

School name Harmeny Education Trust, Balerno
SEED number: 5571448

Harmeny Education Trust is a grant-aided special school which provides care and all-through education for children and young people with complex social, emotional and behavioural needs. There are 25 children and young people learning at the broad general education stages and five young people working at the senior phase. Most live on campus and a few attend the school through the day service.

The headteacher is supported by a depute headteacher, a newly appointed education manager and a service manager with responsibility for day services and outdoor education. There are six classes. Each class is supported by one social educator and at least one education support worker. Social educators work with children and young people throughout the year, including during school holidays.

The school began working with children over 14 years old in 2023, when the 'learning hub' was created to support young people beyond primary age into secondary education.

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

- Staff across Harmeny provide a nurturing and responsive learning environment. Most children and young people enjoy school and engage well in their learning. Teachers plan experiences that are tailored to learners' interests, helping them stay focused and motivated. All staff adopt a relational approach, which underpins their interactions. Almost all staff build strong, positive relationships that support emotional wellbeing and engagement.
- Staff monitor engagement in learning closely by recording this on a school database. They use this information effectively to identify patterns and implement timely support for children and young people. Staff embed The Harmeny Way throughout classroom practice, creating therapeutic learning environments that support emotional regulation, engagement, and progress. All staff have extensive training which incorporates de-escalation techniques informed by trauma-responsive and relational approaches. Staff use their understanding of child development and neurobiology well to shape interactions, which results in positive learning experiences.
- A few children and young people disengage from their learning through self-directed breaks. There is scope to develop a more consistent approach to re-engaging children and young people who leave the classroom for self-directed breaks. While most staff are keen for learners to return quickly, a shared strategy would help ensure that transitions back into learning are smooth and supportive.
- Additionally, care and education staff should work more collaboratively to address late coming. A few learners, particularly those living on campus, take longer to prepare for learning in the morning due to the timing of their wake-up routines. A coordinated approach would help ensure that all learners are ready to engage promptly at the start of the day.
- Most teachers set work at a pace that is appropriately challenging. They use individualised plans and differentiate activities appropriately to match learners' stages of development. Teachers provide extension tasks when learners complete work, and staff are skilled at recognising when to increase the level of challenge. They maintain a sensitive approach, building learners' confidence through achievable tasks and gradually introducing more demanding learning. Teachers should continue to raise expectations and ensure all learners experience consistent challenge. This includes promptly identifying when learners are ready to progress to more complex tasks, particularly where learners find initial activities too easy.
- Staff demonstrate a deep understanding of learners' needs and adapt their teaching accordingly. They use visual timetables effectively to help children and young people anticipate their day and feel prepared. Teachers set out their classrooms thoughtfully to be welcoming and to meet sensory needs, with resources and furnishings that reflect learners' interests and

requirements. Staff create motivational displays to showcase learners' achievements. Staff ensure breakout spaces are available to offer quiet areas for regulation. Furniture is comfortable and designed for children and young people who require high levels of sensory feedback, for example floor cushions, rocking and wobble chairs. This helps learners to feel comfortable, calm and can increase their capacity for concentration during learning.

- Teachers plan activities which support learners to develop social skills and resilience. For example, during outdoor learning, children and young people enhance their physical development and social confidence in the community. School staff also help younger learners increase their capacity to regulate their bodies and emotions. Staff do this by integrating repeated, predictable activities throughout the day which build children's core strength. They use a balance board or other activities which build children's proprioception or body awareness.
- Children and young people experience activities that take place in the local and wider community. These are risk assessed appropriately and contribute positively to resilience and social development. Staff now need to ensure that these activities are progressive. As a next step, senior leaders should ensure that activities become increasingly challenging over time and contribute to a more joined-up curriculum
- Teachers use a broad range of assessment approaches, including observation, verbal feedback, and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Benchmarks. Teachers use formative assessment well to gauge learners' understanding and progress. This aligns with the school's learning and teaching and assessment policies. A few teachers make particularly effective use of digital tools, including quiz-style software and artificial intelligence-supported (AI) differentiation. In some cases, learners co-design assessments based on texts, documentaries or news reels, which enhances engagement and ownership. Staff use assessment well to support leaders to make decisions about learners' readiness for progression to college or mainstream settings. They also use assessment effectively to identify specific needs, such as dyslexia. In the best example, learners are actively involved in their assessment and benefit from varied, inclusive approaches that support their progression. Staff should continue to encourage learners to self-assess and engage in peer assessment to build independence and reflection. Current initial assessment tools do not fully reflect the needs of Harmony's learners, and the introduction of skills tracking will help capture broader progress more effectively.
- Termly attainment meetings between teachers and senior leaders are effective in identifying and reviewing learners' progress. Staff work closely with care colleagues to track outcomes against resilience targets, using daily case notes to monitor progress. However, while most learners meet their targets, progress from year to year is not always evident in tracking systems. Staff now need to develop a shared understanding of progress and CfE levels. Senior leaders should work with teachers to improve accuracy and consistency of assessment approaches. Teachers should re-establish work with other schools in order to develop and improve their practice in this area.
- Teachers compile medium-term and daily plans that take good account of learners' developmental stages. The deputy headteacher implemented a three-year cycle of planning for learning across the curriculum. They reviewed this recently to ensure relevance and appropriateness. This is supporting staff to plan learning which is varied and supports learners' interests and needs well as they move through the school. Staff should now work together to increase opportunities for learners to be more involved in choosing their own topics and setting their own targets. Senior leaders have identified the need to introduce new baseline assessment measures and develop systems for tracking skills progression across all curricular areas.

- All children and young people have social and emotional behaviour needs (SEBN). As a result, a few learners display very disruptive behaviour at times, due to past trauma and difficulties forming and sustaining relationships. Staff plan for such incidences using individualised planning and risk assessments. The staff team work hard to form positive relationships and to help learners form bonds and positive relationships with their peers. This is mainly successful, however there remain a few young people whose behaviour and language is offensive. Overall, the school deals well with this, but it can have a negative impact on other children and young people. Senior leaders should prioritise taking a proactive approach to ensure that the effect on other learners is minimised.

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

- Overall, most children and young people are making good progress in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics, in comparison to their prior levels of attainment.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children and young people are making good progress in literacy and English. They are attaining and working within national milestones and up to third level of CfE.

Listening and talking

- At national milestones level, learners respond to spoken instructions and are beginning to show appropriate turn-taking when engaging in conversation with supportive adults. At early level, children and young people know the single sounds made by letters and how these can be used to make combinations of sounds. At first level, learners listen and respond appropriately within a group setting. This includes turn-taking and answering questions appropriately. Children and young people at second level share their ideas and opinions well when engaging with others. They are respectful of the views of others and apply non-verbal and verbal techniques such as maintaining eye contact and use tone for emphasis. At third level, learners listen and watch texts, make notes and use these to create their own texts. Children and young people at second and third level need to further develop their talking and listening skills in less familiar and more formal settings.

Reading

- Learners at national milestones level are, with support, developing an understanding of sounds and are beginning to practice recognising letters. At early level, children and young people listen well to stories and show enjoyment. Learners at first level read a range of fiction and non-fiction texts to select and make notes on key information related to topic work. At second level, children and young people identify the key points in extended texts. They select and sort information to recall important details. Learners at third level respond to a range of questions and make literal and inferential responses. Children and young people from first to third level should continue to develop further their knowledge of literary techniques, such as sentence structure, punctuation and imagery.

Writing

- At national milestones level, learners group letters and are exploring different media to develop their writing skills. For example, they use chalk in outdoor areas to practise their understanding of letter formation. Children and young people at early level form most letters accurately and are exploring basic punctuation, such as letters and full stops. At first level, learners create written texts to persuade others by carefully selecting appropriate vocabulary and organising their writing for a purpose, such as advertising class events. Children and young people at second level present ideas in a well-structured manner and use techniques such as emotive

language and rhetorical questions to engage the reader. At third level, learners organise their thoughts in a logical order and provide detail and evidence to support their views. Children and young people from first to third level would benefit from more opportunities for extended writing activities.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most young people are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. They are attaining and working within national milestones and up to CfE third level. Overall, number, money and measure is further developed than shape, position and movement; and information handling.

Number, money and measure

- At national milestones level, learners identify some coins and understand the language of money such as pounds and pence. At early level, children and young people understand addition and subtraction using numbers with one and two-digit numbers. Learners at first level record measurements using standard units such as grams, millilitres and litres. At second level, children and young people sequence numbers well up to one million. They have a firm understanding of place and value and use this to extend the range of whole numbers that they can work with. Learners at third level solve a range of problems using fractions, percentages and decimals. At second level, children and young people need to develop further their knowledge of measurement.

Shape, position and movement

- Learners at national milestones level recognise the name of simple shapes and are exploring two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) shapes. At early level, children and young people sort 2-dimensional (2D) shapes and 3-dimensional objects and describe their features. Learners from first to third level need further opportunities to enhance their knowledge of shape, position and movement.

Information handling

- At national milestones level, learners follow directions in games and activities and are aware of positional language, such as up, down, over and under. Children and young people at early level use their knowledge of shape and colour to match and sort items. At first level, learners use concrete materials to create charts detailing different features, such as colours. Children and young people at second level effectively use venn diagrams and bar graphs to interpret and present information accurately using suitable scales. Learners at third level describe trends in data and use appropriate technology to share their knowledge. Young people at third level would benefit from more opportunities to develop their information handling skills.

Attainment over time

- Most children and young people in the BGE are attaining well across the curriculum over time. Most learners are making strong progress in relation to their prior levels of attainment. Staff track progress using a digital platform, standardised assessments and internal systems which detail progress over recent sessions. Staff recognise the need to streamline the use of data so that they are clearer on what they are using to plan learners' next steps. Senior leaders should continue with current plans to further develop approaches to moderation and quality assurance to increase confidence in teacher's judgements.
- Most young people in the senior phase are making good progress in comparison with their prior levels of attainment. The current group of S4 pupils are the first full cohort to attend Harmeny School. Young people are benefitting from the curricular offer and all learners have been registered for an appropriate level and number of qualifications. Staff should continue to build on the positive progress made so far to further increase the range of subjects and qualifications

available to learners. This should include planning to increase the level of qualification for learners who may be capable of attaining at higher levels in upcoming sessions.

- Young people are benefitting from well-developed processes to monitor their attendance. Senior leaders record and regularly review attendance. According to the school's own data, the current school attendance is 96%. Most of the children and young people are residential. Senior leaders report that this figure is in line with the attendance figure in recent sessions. This figure is above the national average for the sector. A few learners are below 90%. Staff monitor engagement and learning in each class and record when young people have removed themselves from class. Senior leaders review this data to identify where patterns exist. Senior leaders engage with staff, parents and partners to plan interventions to improve attendance and address truancy from class when required. As a result, most young people are benefitting from sustained, positive patterns of attendance.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- All children and young people benefit from the school's recognition of their successes at individual, class and whole school levels. Learners enjoy personal reward systems which teachers use very well to encourage and motivate them to participate fully in their learning. The school has also introduced Above and Beyond Awards. These celebrate children and young people who have made a special contribution to their class, community or by producing a particularly strong piece of classwork. Learners highly value these awards and show pride when they receive them. At a whole school level, staff record successful moments throughout the week, and pictures of work, activities and events are shown at Friday Meeting assemblies. Senior leaders monitor and record effectively the awards and achievements that children and young people receive to make sure that no learner misses out on recognition. As a result, almost all children and young people are gaining in confidence in an environment where they their successes are acknowledged and celebrated very well.
- Almost all learners participate very well in an extensive range of outdoor learning activities. These activities include climbing, kayaking, bushcraft, horse-riding and mountain biking. Children and young people speak very positively about these experiences which are built into their learning programmes. They are benefitting by developing new skills and by enhancing their communication and social skills in the community. At secondary level, the school is using an outdoor learning consultant to develop a progressive skills framework with awards at different levels. As a next step, senior leaders should continue with current plans to accredit the achievements of children in primary. This should ensure that there is progression in the skills that they are learning. In doing so, staff should expand further accreditation in the senior phase to recognise more fully young people's successes.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have a well-developed understanding of the context of the school. They are highly dedicated to ensuring that children and young people are fully included and involved in school and in the community. Staff are aware of the additional support needs of each learner and provide high levels of support to make sure that most children and young people engage in daily learning and planned activities.
- Staff have a well-established positive culture of equity and inclusion across the school. Learners do not experience barriers to participating in activities and events and there are effective supports in place to mitigate the impact of the cost of the school day. Senior leaders allocate Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to fund interventions such as therapy programmes. PEF is also used to resource areas of the school to support wellbeing, such as the sensory room. Senior leaders should review planning and monitoring processes for PEF to more clearly record how funding is being used to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

- Almost all children and young people are benefitting from the school's approaches to developing the young workforce. Almost all learners have opportunities to deepen their knowledge of the world of work and employability skills. The school has provided valuable practical sessions in areas such as construction and gardening. As the current S4 group is the first cohort to move through the senior phase in Harmeny School, there is no meaningful data available around positive destinations. Senior leaders have made strong progress in establishing the senior phase, with the current S4 cohort benefitting from a broad and increasingly relevant range of subjects that reflect learners' interests and support their continued engagement in learning. Staff should continue to build on the positive progress made so far to further increase the range of subjects and qualifications available to learners. This should include planning to increase the level of qualification for learners who may be capable of attaining at higher levels in upcoming sessions.

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.