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

Summarised inspection findings

Onthank Primary School

East Ayrshire Council

17 November 2026

Key contextual information

Onthank Primary School is a non-denominational primary school located in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire. It shares its campus with a local authority special school. At the time of the inspection 533 children were enrolled in the school. Children are educated across 21 classes. Approximately 25% of children are registered for free school meals. Around 38% of children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) bands 1 and 2 and 39% live in SIMD bands 8 and 9. The school reported that 21% of children require additional support.

The headteacher has been in post since 2018. Two new depute headteachers were appointed to their posts in session 2025-26. The headteacher and depute headteachers have responsibility for both the primary school and local authority special school co-located on the campus. At the start of this academic session, the number of principal teacher posts reduced from three to two.

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 work very well with staff to build a school community where children feel welcome and valued. They have developed a strong approach to promoting and respecting the rights of children. Children are rightly very proud that their work on ensuring children's rights are upheld within the school. Overall, staff are very effective in developing meaningful and supportive relationships with children and families. The school values of Community, Ambition, Respect, Equity and Safety are embedded within the culture of the school. The high focus on promoting safe and secure relationships across the school is supporting children predict responses from staff and remain calm and ready to learn.

- School leaders and staff place high importance on providing purposeful and attractive learning spaces. As a result, children benefit from consistently inclusive, high-quality and well-resourced learning environments. Teachers ensure displays are motivating for children to refer to and have a clear purpose. They are working well to ensure there is an appropriate balance of children's work and areas where children can reference learning. Children feel ownership and pride that their work is presented very well within classroom and shared areas. This supports their sense of inclusion and motivation to learn.

- Across most lessons, teachers provide children with interesting learning experiences. In a few lessons, teachers provide learning experiences that are highly motivating and matched very well to children's needs. In these activities, children show high levels of positive interactions with each other, remaining focused on their learning or tasks that they are undertaking. They use

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digital tools to support them develop their learning, including for undertaking research, note taking or recording their work. A few children disengage when they are not challenged appropriately or are passive in learning. School leaders should continue to work with teachers to ensure that all children access progressive learning across their school day. This will allow children to maximise their opportunities to progress their learning.

- School leaders and teachers are making positive steps to increase the consistency and quality of learning experiences for children across the school. They have developed an appropriate strategy to continue their initial progress. School leaders support teachers to engage with professional learning aimed at improving pedagogy and their leadership of learning. Teachers enhanced their understanding of what quality learning and teaching looks like and reflected on how to enhance their teaching following their professional learning. As a result, school leaders and teachers developed a helpful 'Onthank's Excellent Learning Experience' within the learning and teaching policy framework.

- Led well by school leaders, teachers are developing an agreed and consistent approach to the structure of a lesson. Most teachers provide clear explanations to children and share with children the intended learning and the steps to success. Teachers are working well to improve the quality of questioning. As a result, most children are developing their ability to evaluate their learning and are increasingly able to articulate what they are learning and why. In a few classes, teachers work very well with children to independently identify where they are succeeding and where they could improve further. In these classes, teachers use the children's evaluations to inform their teaching and consider where children require more support. Teachers should continue to develop further children's higher order thinking skills.

- In the majority of lessons, teachers provide children with learning across a range of relevant and meaningful contexts. For example, they ensure an appropriate range of learning which uses links across different subjects and real-life experiences. In these contexts, children work effectively as individuals, within groups and with the whole class. Where most effective, teachers teach whole-class activities successfully and meet the range of children's needs very well. In these classes, teachers provide the correct level of support and challenge for almost all children. Across all stages in the school, teachers should ensure that learning is tailored to different needs sufficiently well when delivering whole class lessons. This should help children to experience learning that supports them to build effectively on prior learning and is aligned more closely to their next steps.

- Teachers use a range of assessment approaches effectively, including exit passes, electronic forms, diagnostic assessment tools, and observations. This is supported by the newly refreshed assessment calendar, which is strengthening consistency in assessment practice across the school. Teachers use assessment information well to inform tracking, professional judgements and professional dialogue. School leaders now need to ensure that the detail and impact of assessment is reflected more consistently in longer-term planning. In doing so, they should demonstrate more clearly how assessment evidence informs next steps in learning and teaching.

- Teachers use an agreed approach of Fact, Story, Action to describe in detail children's learning journeys over time. Teachers engage well with professional dialogue to support a shared understanding of children's progress. This enables teachers to track interventions and informs their transition planning for children. School leaders should continue to work with teachers to

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strengthen tracking of interventions further by providing greater evidence on the impact of actions. In doing so, they should ensure that there is clearer evidence of how interventions and next steps improve outcomes for children.

- Teachers provide timely verbal feedback during learning which is helping children understand what they are doing well and what they need to do next to improve. Across learning, children respond positively to this feedback, and talk confidently about their progress and next steps in learning. As a result, most children demonstrate an increasing understanding of their strengths and areas for development. School leaders should now support teachers to develop further the use of purposeful and proportionate written feedback. They should enable children to set meaningful learning targets, identify transferable skills across their learning and better understand the impact of these on their progress over time.

- Teachers engage in regular and meaningful moderation activities with stage partners, across the school and with colleagues beyond the school. This is strengthening the accuracy and consistency of teacher professional judgements. Through these collaborative opportunities, teachers develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations, increasing confidence in assessing children's progress and achievement. As a result, assessment information is becoming more reliable.

- Teachers use a range of local authority and school-based progression pathways effectively to support planning across the curriculum. This includes progressive planners for 1+2 languages, helping meet national expectations. Teachers plan learning experiences which are aligned to children's needs and stages of development. They should now ensure that their planning more explicitly and progressively reflects all children's level of challenge to maximise their learning and achieve their full potential.

- In a few classes, teachers are supporting children effectively to reflect on the skills that they are developing. This has potential to help children to recognise and articulate the skills they are developing. As a result, teachers should increase opportunities for children to make connections between skills and application of skills. As planned, school leaders should continue to work with teachers to develop the use of meta-skills across learning experiences to inform assessment, tracking and planning for progress across the curriculum.

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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.

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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

- Attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. Most children achieve national expectations. A minority of children would benefit from additional challenge in their learning to help raise attainment further.

- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress and a few children make very good progress.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Attainment in literacy is good. Most children achieve national expectations in reading, writing, talking and listening. Senior leaders, as planned, need to ensure that all children make very good progress from their prior levels of attainment. A minority of children are capable of making better progress across literacy and English. In addition, across the school a minority of children do not apply their literacy skills consistently well across the curriculum.

- Most children are articulate, they listen well to their teachers and each other. They create well-structured talks which they present to other children. A majority of children think critically across the curriculum and debate points of interests when participating in the school leadership groups. A minority of children are capable of evaluating different viewpoints and constructing reasoned arguments more effectively to express their opinions. There is a need to continue to develop children's talking and listening skills progressively with accurate assessments.

- Most children write well across a range of genres. They structure their writing using accurate punctuation and vocabulary. Most children's presentation in writing is neat and demonstrates clarity of their ideas. Teachers need to ensure that all children continue to write across a range of genre and at length.

- Most children across the school understand and apply a wide range of reading strategies such as visualisation, predicting and questioning to support their comprehension. They regularly access a range of texts from the school libraries which they read for enjoyment. A minority of children need to develop further their skills in comprehension and fluency.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A minority of children make very good progress and are working ahead of national expectations.

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- Children across the school demonstrate confidence and skill when using a wide range of strategies to complete numerical calculations. They are developing well their knowledge of place value. They transfer their learning in numeracy successfully to new contexts and enjoy attempting increasingly complex problems. They would benefit from increased, and more consistent, opportunities to experience more challenge in their learning. The quality and quantity of children's written work in numeracy and mathematics is highly variable across the school. Teachers should now build on the examples of positive practice and promote consistently high standards of presentation. All children should have the opportunity to complete valuable written numeracy and mathematics tasks on a more frequent basis.

Attainment over time

- School leaders and teachers closely track the number of children at P1, P4 and P7 who achieve expected levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. The school has sustained positive attainment across literacy and numeracy over the previous four years. School leaders have developed a strategy to continue to improve or sustain levels of attainment, with a particular focus on reading and writing. In doing so, they aim to improve the reliability of data and use this to inform better teacher professional judgement and planning.

- More children are now achieving expected levels in writing, with attainment increasing from a majority to most children. Most children continue to achieve expected levels in reading. Children's attainment in numeracy has shown a positive upward trend, particularly at P4 and P7. Children's attainment in listening and talking remains consistently high.

- School leaders track the progress of children as they move through the school. Overall, most children demonstrate either improving or consistently positive attainment over time. Children's attainment is stronger in numeracy than literacy. Teachers do not yet track children's attainment in all curricular areas. School leaders should now work with teachers to develop approaches to tracking children's progress across the curriculum.

- School leaders effectively monitor the progress and attainment of children who have potential barriers to their learning. These include children who are impacted by their socio-economic circumstances, attendance rate and experience of care. Most of these children make good progress in their learning.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children across the school benefit from numerous opportunities to develop confidence and leadership skills, both in school and within the local community. They participate in a wide range of sporting and community events developing teamworking skills and a sense of belonging. They are active participants in groups that focus on pupil leadership, children's rights, digital leaders, eco and sports. Children's participation and role in these groups contribute positively to the national recognition of the school's work on children's rights and sport. Children across the school are enthusiastic about their leadership roles. They have a voice in a number of decisions that affect them and other children across the school. They are beginning to understand the importance of the skills they are developing, and children now lead a few groups independently. Moving forward there is a need for school leaders, as planned, to continue to ensure that children's achievements are improving progressively. This will ensure children build on applying their skills through their varied interests both in school and out.

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Equity for all learners

- School leaders have embedded equity for all children within the school's universal support to improve children's attendance, wellbeing, engagement and attainment. Their use of Pupil Equity Funding initiatives demonstrates improvements for children's attendance and attainment in numeracy and writing. In addition, children receiving interventions across the school improved their emotional and social development. School leaders should now work with the local authority to ensure that use of available Pupil Equity Funding for the school is maximised. This has potential to improve outcomes for children and families even more.

- School leaders closely monitor the impact of the wide range of interventions in place to improve outcomes for children. They have a clear understanding of how the school is improving outcomes for children. This includes children affected by poverty, those who are care experienced or experiencing other barriers to learning. School leaders use available data effectively to help them plan supports to improve children's attendance, engagement and participation. Overall, data provided by school leaders indicates that the attainment and attendance gap is narrowing between children living in areas with the most disadvantage and those children living in areas with the least deprivation. Teachers need to continue to focus on evaluating the impact of interventions and continue to raise attainment across all areas of literacy for children.

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Other relevant evidence

- Overall attendance for academic session 2025-26 was 92.4%. Attendance at school has increased from 91% in 2022-23 but is down from 93.5% in session 2024-25. Over time, average attendance at school remains broadly in line with national averages. The rate of persistent absence (attendance below 90%) is 24%. This has increased since session 2024-25 where it was 21.3%.

- Staff have developed a useful guide to support positive attendance. This includes very clear processes for staff to follow and ensure a consistent approach to recording and reporting attendance. Parents receive early notice where their child's attendance is dropping. This helps highlight the importance of increasing attendance at the earliest opportunity. Home link support staff undertake home visits where children's attendance remains low or is going below 85%. They work with school leaders and parents to consider interventions and supports that may help children increase their attendance at school. Overall, the supports offered help almost all children sustain high levels of attendance. There is a need for school leaders to help improve the attendance of children living with in SIMD 1 and 2 as the average attendance for this cohort is below 90%. A few children continue to have persistent absence over longer periods of time. School leaders should continue to develop approaches to target those with the lowest attendance. In doing so, they should consider available supports and interventions both within the school and with partners to ensure that children maximise attendance and benefit fully from school.

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the 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.

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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.

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