

Summarised inspection findings

St Stephen's Primary School

North Lanarkshire Council

8 September 2026

Key contextual information

St Stephen's Primary School is a denominational school in the Coatbridge area of North Lanarkshire. The school roll is 291 including 52 children in the Language and Communication Support centre (LCSC). Just over half of the children attending the mainstream and all the children attending the LCSC have an additional support need. Forty nine percent of children of the total school roll have an individual education plan. Almost half of the children live in Social Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 and 2 and 22% of children are entitled to free school meals.

The headteacher has been in post for fourteen years. She is supported two depute headteacher and two principal teachers. One of the depute headteacher's posts and the two principal teacher's posts are funded by Pupil Equity Funding.

A new school building scheduled to open in October 2026 is being built in the playground. During the period of construction, children have experienced restricted areas to learn and play in both the school grounds and the school building.

1.3 Leadership of change

excellent

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher and staff collectively and confidently embrace the school's vision, values and aims, which have been developed through highly effective collaboration with children, parents and partners. Strongly rooted in the Gospel Values, the school's vision and values are shared, well understood and embedded across the life and work of the school. The values are highly visible within learning environments and align very well with the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), promoting a consistent, rights-respecting ethos. Across the school and community, children and staff have very high ambitions for themselves and each other as learners and participants within the school community. This school ethos is built on professional trust. Children are trusted, they trust the adults in the school and importantly all staff are trusted to fulfil their roles and responsibilities to the highest standards.
- The school values of Perseverance, Courage, Respect, Tolerance, Compassion, Inclusions and Ambition are clearly reflected in the headteacher's strategic leadership and daily practice, shaping a culture of equity, inclusion and high expectations for all. These values underpin curriculum design, learning and teaching approaches and continuous improvement planning. Staff consistently model and reinforce the values through highly positive relationships, creating a nurturing, aspirational and inclusive environment. As a result, almost all children have a deep understanding of the values. They demonstrate and articulate them confidently and consistently in their learning, behaviour and interactions, both within school and beyond. The

values have a strong and sustained positive impact on wellbeing, relationships and attitudes to learning. All staff in the school promote equality, dignity and social justice.

- The headteacher's relentless focus on professional learning as a strategic driver for change is outstanding. Her inspirational leadership is at the heart of the school community. She leads change very effectively within the school and across and outwith the local authority. The headteacher is held in the highest regard by children, parents, staff, partners and wider community. She places a consistently high value on improvement and professional enquiry that improves outcomes for children. Her approach inspires teachers and staff to engage in high-quality professional learning that is purposeful, intellectually challenging and closely aligned to the school's identified priorities. Professional learning opportunities are carefully planned to challenge thinking, deepen understanding of pedagogy and promote reflective, enquiry-based practice. As a result, staff engage confidently in professional dialogue, critically evaluate their practice and implement highly effective approaches to learning and teaching.
- Staff demonstrate a high level of professional curiosity and ownership of their learning. This is evidenced through active participation in research-informed learning and a willingness to innovate and take measured risks. Partnerships with universities and professional networks further strengthen their professional knowledge, with several staff achieving master's-level qualifications and national professional recognition. Staff across the school and LCSC have a deep, shared understanding of effective pedagogy which leads to consistent, high-quality practice and sustained improvements in learners' experiences and outcomes. They regularly look outward, visiting other establishments to further enhance their own practice.
- The headteacher and senior leaders robust and well-embedded structures support collaboration, participation and leadership at all levels across the school, cluster and local authority. The school's work is recognised as effective practice and influences change in the practice of many colleagues who visit. Of note is the school's approach to sharing their own good practice in children being able to talk about their learning and their work on inclusion internally and with other schools. Children and staff have visited other schools, shared their work across number of local authorities, including North Lanarkshire Council and presented at national conferences. Importantly, children and staff are empowered to lead and manage change. Children's active participation both in class and through the pupil council in school improvement planning is meaningful and impacts significantly on the decision-making approaches within the school. Children influenced approaches to learning and teaching and as a result, learning is now interesting and highly engaging.
- Senior leaders have a clear plan to continue to raise attainment across the school. School improvement plans are informed by a range of sources that ensure improvement priorities accurately reflect the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Senior leaders and staff have continued to manage the pace of change very effectively during a period of disruption due to building works taking place in the school grounds. Despite these significant challenges, there have been improvements to learning and teaching and the quality of children's experiences across the curriculum. Children continue to thrive and make better progress in their learning.
- Senior leaders promote a highly participative approach to improvement by protecting time for professional enquiry and educational research within school improvement meetings. This enables purposeful professional dialogue, challenge and debate, and supports staff to take shared ownership of change. Evidence from formal and informal feedback demonstrates a

strong, inclusive culture where staff and children are empowered and expected to lead improvement. This leadership at all levels approach is evident in the high levels of engagement and sustained commitment to improvement groups. In addition, the effective work of the pupil council, provides a meaningful, influential and visible platform for children's voice. As a result, staff and learners contribute confidently to decision-making and play an active role in shaping improvement, ensuring that change is collective, responsive and sustained over time. Children articulate very effectively how much they've influenced approaches to learning across the school.

- Senior leaders approach to stakeholder engagement in planning for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is long established and well-understood by children and parents. The PEF plans are embedded within the whole school approach to raising attainment and while closing the poverty related attainment gap.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

excellent

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

- Children's engagement in their learning is outstanding. They are highly motivated, confident and actively take responsibility for their own learning. The high-quality and exceptional learning experiences are relevant, innovative, and exciting. Across the school, children engage fully in leading their own learning and develop a strong work ethic. Teaching and support staff inspire children to achieve their best, and together staff and children are fully invested in the whole school community, fostering a strong culture of belonging, collaboration and shared success.
- All staff are highly skilled, motivated and work seamlessly together. All teaching staff have a very highly developed understanding of pedagogy, which is informed by relevant professional learning, collaborative practice and collective dialogue. Staff see their role in school as a vocation, promote children's rights very effectively and educate with care, compassion and high expectations.
- Gospel values underpin the work of the school and are clearly visible on walls and in classrooms. Staff consistently focus on promoting children's personal growth through a culture of care and respect. Children and staff live the school values and children enjoy the inclusive child focused learning experiences. Children feel respected and participate enthusiastically in school activities. They show compassions, have very high expectations of what they can achieve and are incredibly proud of their school.
- Children behave very well and actively encourage one another to do their best. They are kind and supportive in their interactions and when needed. Staff provide skilled and caring support to create a calm, purposeful and positive atmosphere, where children feel highly valued and show resilience. If needed, children to use a wide range of effective strategies to regulate and manage their emotions.
- Almost all children are highly articulate learners with a wide and varied vocabulary enabling them to express their thoughts, ideas and opinions with confidence and clarity. Their views on their own learning and the wider world are respected and considered by staff. Children know they are listened to and this helps them to be highly engaged in and feel ownership of their learning. Almost all children are confident to talk about how they learn and what they need to do to improve. Their teachers ensure they have a variety of ways to learn and to demonstrate their learning. Almost all children are supported exceptionally well to extend their thinking and to explain their decision making, demonstrating a deep understanding of their learning.

- All staff understand children's learning needs very well. Senior leaders and promoted staff provide a comprehensive range of data to class teachers. Teachers use this information both skilfully and sensitively to maximise learning opportunities. They adapt their teaching for children's needs and plan appropriate and creative programmes of work. As a result, children demonstrate a secure understanding of learning concepts and can articulate their thinking clearly. As planned, teachers should consider how to extend learning further for those pupils who are exceeding expectations.
- At the early stages, teachers and senior leaders work effectively as a team to develop learning experiences through play. Teachers skilfully balance adult-led and child-initiated learning. They have enhanced the environment to provide a range of spaces and activities to support children well to practise skills in different contexts through play. Children access activities which develop their creativity, discovery and curiosity powerfully. Teachers regularly reflect and review this approach making worthwhile adaptations to learning on an ongoing basis. They should continue to provide play-based experiences that build on children's learning across the curriculum and make full use of all available spaces to support free-flow play and learning.
- Digital technology is fully embedded across all areas of the curriculum. Children use this technology confidently, appropriately and purposefully. They use bar matrix codes and other discrete digital tools as well as tablets and online learning resources very well. This creative and powerful use of digital technology supports, extends and consolidates children's learning across all stages. Teachers adapt learning very well to meet the needs of children who experience barriers to learning by using effectively assistive technology. As a result, all children develop independence and resilience in their learning.
- Senior leaders clear strategic focus on improving the quality of learning and teaching underpins the very high standard of teaching in all classes. All staff consistently apply the 'Excellent school learning and teaching policy', resulting in lessons which are clearly structured and based on sound educational principles. All staff clearly articulate the purpose of learning. This approach results in children who are clear about how they can be successful in their learning. Teachers create frequent and well-planned opportunities for children to influence and make decisions about their learning. Teachers make frequent reference to prior learning and good use of plenaries to check for children's understanding.
- All classrooms are very well organised with a variety of engaging resources. Children independently select interesting resources to support and extend their learning. Classrooms and breakout spaces are bright and interesting, which helps stimulate children's engagement and curiosity. These well-planned spaces enable children to move around with confidence and purpose.
- Teachers plan programmes of learning which intentionally develop children's meta-skills and plan how children's higher order thinking skills can be developed in all lessons. This approach is integrated extremely effectively in all lessons. As a result, almost all children are highly reflective learners who engage thoughtfully with new ideas. They confidently articulate the skills they develop through their activities and make relevant connections to real-life contexts. Children are confident to ask questions to deepen their understanding and are intellectually curious.
- Teachers provide clear explanations and instructions in almost all classes. Dialogue between teachers and children is strong and focused on developing learning. Teachers' questioning is

consistently effective in promoting higher-order thinking, and feedback is used well to extend and deepen children's understanding. As a result, almost all children communicate their thinking confidently, demonstrate secure understanding and respond positively to challenge.

- Senior leaders have produced an effective assessment policy, which includes a useful assessment calendar. As a result, all teachers implement very effectively a range of summative and formative assessments. They input assessment information into their online tracker and use this data to support their professional judgements on children's progress. All teachers involve children very successfully in assessing their own work and the work of others. In most lessons, teachers provide children with very effective verbal and written feedback, which supports children's progress. This approach supports children very well to understand what they are doing well and how to improve their work.
- All teachers engage in well-planned moderation activities. A few teachers participate in training and professional dialogue with colleagues across the local authority. They then lead moderation activities for their colleagues in school. A minority of staff have engaged in a professional qualification relating to the teaching of numeracy. A few of these teachers support their colleagues by modelling strong practice and coaching their colleagues in this area. Teachers also benefit from opportunities to observe each other's practice and to teach collaboratively with each other. These opportunities are supporting teachers to embed consistently high-quality teaching and to make increasingly accurate professional judgements relating to children's progress and against national standards.
- Teachers plan effectively over the short, medium and long term. Senior leaders monitor robustly teachers' forward plans and provide effective feedback. This approach helps to ensure that the standard of planning across the school is consistently high. Importantly, teachers involve children successfully in planning aspects of their learning. They support children very well to reflect on prior learning and make links very successfully to the skills they are developing through their learning. All teachers refer to progression pathways to plan engaging learning activities for children across the school. Moving forward, teachers should continue to use these pathways effectively and develop them further to track a few children's progress through a level in a few areas of the curriculum more robustly.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Staff implement CfE progression pathways across all curriculum areas that ensure progression, breadth, depth, personalisation, challenge and enjoyment. Their use of these backdrop planners supports effective differentiation where learning is set at the correct level for individual children. In addition, teachers ensure learner autonomy whereby children take control of their own learning process, making decisions about how they learn. Staff use these planning frameworks creatively when responding to children's needs and interests. In addition, staff ensures that children's meta-skills are explicitly taught in relevant contexts. As a result of the effective planning based on the school's learning pathways, children can articulate the skills they develop during their outstanding and highly motivating learning contexts.
- Children benefit from meaningful learning contexts that balance adult-led and child-led learning. As a result of the interactive approaches underpinned by the learning pathways, children at P5 to P7 co-construct activities that challenge their thinking and develops their independence. The pathways include well planned discrete areas of learning and a progressive approach to outdoor learning. In addition, children access their full 1+ 2 languages entitlement in French and Spanish.
- The curriculum is ambitious, supports differentiation and places learners at the centre of learning. Staff maintain a strong focus on skills development, enabling almost all children to articulate the skills they are developing. The active learning approach provides a structure for curriculum delivery. It seeks to develop confident, independent and responsible learners who benefit from genuine personalisation and choice in their learning. All learning enables teachers the opportunity to work closely with groups and individual children. This includes well planned opportunities for children to learn together across the mainstream classes and LCSC classes. Staff create time and space to observe, interact and scaffold children's learning, taking account of their individual needs.
- Children confidently identify their strengths and next steps in learning across almost all curriculum areas. Staff should continue to ensure that the high-quality learning in the delivery of interdisciplinary learning, where children learn across different subjects, more explicitly link to national benchmarks.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents and carers strong and purposeful partnerships with the staff are central to St. Stephen's approach. The proactive Parent Council maintains a strong focus on school improvement, while fundraising events directly enhance learners' experiences. Parents receive regular communication through emails, monthly newsletters, social media and Learning Journals, ensuring high engagement and timely information sharing. Key dates are shared well in advance to support participation.
- Senior leaders are highly visible at the school gate and operate an open-door policy, enabling concerns to be addressed promptly. Transition programmes, particularly nursery to P1, foster positive relationships and help children to make a very positive start to school. The transition programmes receive consistently positive feedback. While communication is viewed positively by most parents, a few parents feel there is scope for further development.
- Senior leaders share regularly with parents the impact persistent absence has on children's progress and attainment. They discuss attendance issues at Parent Council meetings and send emails and updates to all parents. Most parents have a strong understanding of the importance of regular attendance and its link to positive outcomes for children. They work in partnership with the school to promote regular attendance, helping children to engage fully in their learning.
- Staff demonstrate a strong awareness of the school's socio-economic context, ensuring inclusive participation and removal of financial barriers. Annual calendars and family learning workshops offer meaningful opportunities for involvement, closely linked to school improvement priorities. The range of family learning opportunities further support parental involvement. Family learning effectively targets specific issues that arise. Parents speak very positively about a recent session delivered by the Educational psychologist on how stress and anxiety impacts on the body.
- Children confidently share their learning at P1 onwards. This learning is shared through a wide range of effective approaches with parents. Most importantly, children themselves play a leading role in communicating and celebrating their learning. A recently introduced digital platform provides children with regular opportunities to share and reflect on their learning. Children update their progress on an ongoing basis, and its impact continues to strengthen as staff and children develop greater confidence and expertise in its use.

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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

excellent

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

- The headteacher and senior leader's approach to inclusion and wellbeing is outstanding. Their highly effective practice is recognised beyond the school, with educators from across local authorities making regular visits to learn from and engage with their work. The headteacher regularly represents the school and the local authority on a range of strategic groups, including placement panels for children with additional support needs.
- Senior leaders' highly effective values-driven leadership, inclusive attitudes and behaviours are embraced by children and staff. Collectively staff create an exceptionally strong, nurturing culture where kindness, respect and belonging underpin all aspects of school life. Children feel highly cared for, highly respected and that their wellbeing is at the heart of the school's work. They articulate their wellbeing confidently and know about strategies that help them maintain positive physical, mental and social health. Across the mainstream and LCSC classes, children thrive in this highly supportive and inclusive environment for learning.
- The strongly evident inclusive ethos is deeply embedded across the whole school community. The LCSC is fully embedded into the life and work of the school. Autism is well understood and positively recognised across the school. Staff have an expert understanding of children's social, emotional and communication needs and apply highly skilled, proactive approaches to identify and meet these needs quickly and sensitively. Pastoral and wellbeing support for all children is carefully targeted, ensuring that children are happy and enjoy coming to school to learn. These inclusive approaches ensure all children can participate fully in high-quality learning experiences alongside their peers.
- Children feel safe, respected, fully valued and supported as individuals. They demonstrate exceptionally high standards of behaviour and respect for each other and adults who work in the school. Children feel safe, valued and supported. They have a strong understanding of wellbeing and what this means in their lives. They know how to regulate their own behaviours and respond calmly and supportively when their peers feel challenged.
- Staff consistently demonstrate outstanding practice in promoting equity, wellbeing and achievement for all. Children's strong self-worth, confidence and understanding of their value within the school community is reflected in their achievements and success. Approaches to anti-bullying are embedded across the school, and children are confident that bullying is not an issue. They believe that any incidents of bullying would be addressed promptly and effectively by staff.

- Staff understand children's social and emotional needs exceptionally well and use highly effective nurturing approaches to remove barriers to learning. The sensitive and timely identification of needs ensures that children receive the right support at the right time. As a result, children feel valued, included and fully connected to the school community, benefiting from effective interventions that support wellbeing and accelerate progress.
- Children benefit from very well organised, learning environments with accessible resources that enable pupils to work independently and seek help when needed. Teacher guidance and clear routines help children recognise when they need support and how to access it. As a result, children are resilient, independent, and motivated learners who take responsibility for their progress and successfully overcome challenges in their learning.
- A progressive health and wellbeing programme, high-quality physical education (PE) and strong safeguarding systems promote wellbeing and inclusion very effectively. Children enjoy and benefit from weekly PE outdoors throughout the year. Staff ensure that children have suitable clothing to access the well-planned outdoor PE irrespective of the weather.
- Class teachers confidently monitor and track children's wellbeing, responding promptly to identified needs. They implement targeted interventions that have a highly positive impact on individual children and the wider class. Highly effective collaboration between class teachers and support staff ensures that children feel included, listened to and well supported to achieve their best. Children enjoy coming to school, attendance continues to improve, and there have been no exclusions. Through high-quality leadership and citizenship opportunities, children play an active role in shaping positive change within the school. As a result, they feel safe, valued and listened to, and recognise the school's positive contribution to their health and wellbeing.
- Children are integral members of the school's inclusive learning community. They benefit from highly effective classroom practice, underpinned by well-planned universal support that ensures learning is accessible to all. A particular strength is the confidence with which children advocate for themselves and express their needs. Staff can articulate clearly the positive impact of carefully planned interventions in meeting individual needs and improving outcomes for children.
- Children are integral to the whole school inclusive learning community. They benefit from class learning that focuses on very well planned universal inclusive support for all children that is accessible. Of note is the self-advocacy children across the school demonstrate. Staff can articulate accurately the progress children make as a result of very well-planned interventions that meet individual's needs.
- Support for learning is inclusive, embedded and highly effective. Children demonstrate a strong understanding of how they learn best and how to support others in their learning. They confidently access and use a range of strategies and resources to overcome barriers to learning, including visual supports, prompts, digital tools and peer support. Children with additional support needs speak confidently about their strengths, barriers to learning and the highly effective support that enables them to access the curriculum fully and participate successfully in learning and the wider life of the school. As a result, children feel included, empowered and well supported in all aspects of their learning.
- The whole-school environment is highly inclusive, with children and staff actively promoting equality, equity and respect. A strong rights-based and values-driven culture is embedded

throughout the school, reflected in its commitment to the UNCRC and positive approaches to relationships and behaviour. Children are empowered and confidently articulate their rights using language that is meaningful and relevant. Both children and staff treat each other with dignity and there are high levels of respect and tolerance for diversity. Staff not only teach children about their rights but also ensure that learning and decision-making are rooted in these rights. Children and staff demonstrate a clear commitment to celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion. By addressing financial and social barriers to learning, the school ensures that all learners are supported, included and empowered to succeed and thrive.

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

- Children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is very good. Across the school most children achieve nationally expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in reading, writing and numeracy. Almost all children achieve expected CfE levels in listening and talking. A few children across the school exceed expectations in literacy and numeracy.
- A majority of children who receive additional support for their learning make very good progress, and a minority make good progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Across the school, most children make very good progress in literacy and English. By P7, gaps in children's learning are closed and most children are on track to achieve minimum expected levels with a few exceeding these levels through accelerated progress.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children are highly articulate and engage very effectively in discussions with others, including with visitors to their school. At early level, almost all children respond to questions relevantly and take turns successfully during group and class discussions. A few children should practise generating rhyme from a given word. At first level, almost all children communicate clearly, contributing very well to group and class discussions. They would now benefit from increased opportunities to present to others, including to wider audiences. At second level, almost all children build on the contribution of others. They respond very effectively to a range of literal, inferential and evaluative questions.

Reading

- There is a strong reading culture across the school. They use context clues well to support their understanding of text and predict successfully what will happen next. A minority of children should develop further their recognition of tricky words when reading aloud. At first level, most children answer literal and inferential questions relating to a text. At second level, most children read with fluency and understanding. They scan successfully to find key information and use this to identify the main ideas of a text with appropriate detail.

Writing

- At early level, most children form most lowercase letters legibly, whilst using a pencil with increasing control and confidence. They attempt to spell familiar words correctly. At first level,

most children start sentences in a variety of ways and punctuate most sentences accurately. A minority of children should develop further their creation of interesting characters. At second level, most children use appropriate vocabulary to suit the purpose of their writing, using their notes successfully to develop their thinking. A minority of children should increase the range of punctuation they use and review their writing based on feedback received.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Across the school, most children make very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. By P7 most children are on track to achieve expected levels with clear evidence of accelerated progress as they move through the school. Almost all are skilled in their understanding of mathematical ideas and demonstrate intuitive approaches to problem-solving.

Number, money and measure

- Most children at early level use pictorial representations to solve division problems. They use appropriate language to discuss time including o'clock. At first level, most children solve addition and subtraction problems with three-digit numbers confidently. They calculate costs and change required up to £20 and are aware of digital forms of payment. At second level, most children solve accurately problems using a range of methods and share confidently their approaches and solutions with others. They create equivalent fractions and express fractions in their simplest form. A few children should develop further skill in calculating the sale price of an item with a percentage discount.

Shape, position and movement

- Most children at early level describe the properties of a range of two-dimensional shapes. A few children would benefit from further opportunities to explore and describe features of three-dimensional objects. At first level, most children use effectively compass points and co-ordinates to solve simple problems in movement games. At second level, most children apply their understanding of scale to interpret maps and plans. They use correctly mathematical language to describe and classify a range of angles. A minority of children should now have further experience of interpreting maps with simple scales.

Information handling

- Most children at early level gather very effectively data using tally marks and display very well information on picture graphs. At first level, most children gather, display and extract successfully key information from a range of graphs and charts to answer questions. At second level, most children interpret and draw conclusions very successfully from information displayed.

Attainment over time

- Children's attendance is improving, having been below the national figure for the last three years. This session, children's attendance is 92.3%. A minority of children have attendance below 90%. Senior leaders and staff identify children who have persistent absence and work effectively with parents and partners to improve attendance further. Staff have well-planned approaches to continue to improve the attendance of a few children with persistently low attendance.
- Senior leaders have identified improving punctuality as a key priority. Plans are in place to revise the staggered start and finish times of the school day. While most children arrive on

time, a few continue to arrive late on a regular basis, and further improvement in reducing lateness is required.

- A few children attend school on a part-time timetable. Senior leaders work closely with parents and partners to monitor any child on a part-time timetable. As a result, time in school is increasing for these children.
- Senior leaders and staff meet regularly to discuss and monitor children's progress. They understand well the barriers to success that children may face, including socio-economic disadvantage. Their approach makes a positive difference to children as individuals and has addressed these negative patterns with more children making accelerated progress. Over the last three years, children's attainment has compared well against schools with similar demographics. Senior leaders should now consider further streamlining the systems they have in place to monitor and track children's progress.

Overall quality of learners' achievements.

- Children's achievements are recognised, shared and celebrated successfully. Children talk confidently about and recognise the meta-skills they are developing through their achievement and participation within a variety of pupil voice groups. Children enjoy receiving recognition for their achievements both in and out of school. Staff track the achievements of individuals. They encourage children to join clubs to ensure that no child is at risk of missing out. Senior leaders identify that a next step is to develop a more effective tracking system for wider achievements skills development.
- All children have opportunities to develop further their skills through a variety of extra-curricular lunchtime and after school clubs such as dance and karate. Children at P7 are effectively developing their leadership skills as playground buddies and peer mediators. These opportunities develop children's teamwork, leadership, and communication skills.
- Children contribute very successfully to the life and work of the school within a variety of pupil leadership groups. These opportunities develop children's skills for learning, life and work very well. Through charity events including Minnie Vinnies' and the pupil council, children raise funds for a selection of charities. Their involvement supports children to have a sense of belonging and respect for the wider community.
- St Stephen's Primary staff have secured several prestigious national accreditations reflecting the quality of their practice. These awards include the highest national recognition for promoting children's rights and double digital accreditation for their innovative use of technology to enhance learning. Participation in these awards enables children to develop, apply and enhance a range of skills such as problem solving and communication skills. They speak confidently about cyber resilience and online safety. Children and parents value the opportunities and experiences available which enhance learning and personal development.

Equity for all learners

- Staff take positive and effective action to address the cost of the school day. They ensure family circumstances are not a barrier to participation in opportunities for learning or achievement. Families benefit from a range of sensitive and discreet approaches offered to them. Staff have well-established connections with a range of partners, and all children are included fully in all aspects of school life.

- The headteacher consults with stakeholders on the use of PEF to provide interventions for identified children and to provide universal support across the school. Senior leaders and teachers monitor rigorously the progress of individuals who receive targeted interventions. They use this information very effectively to identify and close gaps in attainment and support children who may be impacted by poverty. As a result, almost all targeted children are making very good progress in their learning.

Context

The Language and Communication Support Centre (LCSC) within St. Stephen's Primary School was established in August 2013. The centre teacher supports children with language and communication support needs from across North Lanarkshire. Fifty-two children currently access the LCSC across nine classes. The classrooms are organised throughout the school alongside their mainstream stage peers. A minority of children have planned time in their mainstream class. In P6 and P7, a few children are accessing fully a mainstream class. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the centre and is supported by a deputy headteacher who has responsibility for the day-to-day leadership of the centre. There is an acting principal teacher who is newly in post on a temporary basis. In addition to the senior leadership team, there are eight teachers and nine learning assistants.

Leadership of change

- The LCSC is fully integrated within the life and work of the school, reflecting the strong commitment to equity and inclusion across the school community. All staff effectively support children to understand and demonstrate the school's values, including respect and tolerance, through positive modelling within everyday interactions.
- Senior leaders are very well respected and have a high profile within the LCSC. They have created a culture in which inclusive practice is at the forefront of all planning and decision-making. Senior leaders have a clear vision of ambition for all children within the LCSC. Children attending the LCSC have access to their mainstream class as fully as possible, considering their individual needs. Commendably, a few children in the upper school have made significant progress through their engagement with the LCSC. This has enabled them to learn alongside their mainstream peers full time, with support provided where needed.
- Staff communicate highly effectively with one another. A strong culture of collegiate working strengthens planning and improvement work. Teachers participate within whole school development groups, further developing their skills and methodologies in areas such as numeracy, health and wellbeing and sustainability. Teachers are empowered to take the lead within these groups and to be creative in their classroom practice. This approach ensures all children experience creative and motivating approaches.
- Senior leaders monitor the quality of learning and children's progress through termly learning observations, regular learning walks and review meetings. The feedback from these visits informs next steps in planning, strategic improvement and staff development.
- Staff engage very well with professional learning, which has strengthened the development of the curriculum and enriched children's engagement with learning. Senior leaders protect time for teachers for sharing practice, professional dialogue and planning.
- Senior leaders and staff are supporting another local school this session to develop its LCSC provision, building meaningful partnerships and sharing effective practice. This work highlights staff's knowledge, expertise and a commitment to sector-wide improvement.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- Across the LCSC, positive and compassionate relationships between staff and children are evident. All staff are nurturing and ensure that children's dignity and rights are respected. Staff know the children very well and they use this knowledge to structure learning activities that motivate and engage children. All staff have high expectations of children, with clear boundaries that support children to achieve.
- In all classes, children's experiences are enjoyable, well-matched to their interests and needs, and are appropriately challenging. Most children have regular opportunities for personalisation and choice in their learning. They are highly engaged in learning through exploration and play, supported by well-planned sensory experiences, including messy play and creative trays with a variety of materials.
- Staff skilfully manage children's ability to self-regulate well. They know children exceptionally well and use robust planning to anticipate and minimise potential conflict. Any issues that arise are handled sensitively, ensuring that children remain engaged and learning time is maximised.
- All classes have a range of visual aids and access to calm working areas. In most classes, there are readily available literacy and numeracy aids to support children to work independently. Learning for children is enriched by the use of digital resources, for example bar matrix codes and a software tool that supports reading and writing.
- Teacher's use of learning intentions and success criteria supports children to understand the purpose of their learning. In all classes, these are adapted to meet the needs of the children. Children enjoy learning in real-life contexts, such as during animal visits and when planting outdoors. They have regular opportunities to purposely play with peers, building their communication and social skills.
- Staff employ a range of assessment approaches to inform on pupil understanding and next steps for individual children. These range from learning conversations, observations, videos and photographs, to more formal assessments. Assessment is informed by the Milestones and CfE. Staff use questioning effectively to check for understanding and adapt or extend learning where required.
- Each child within the LCSC has an individualised Getting it Right for Me plan and learning targets, and staff consider the needs of the children when planning. They plan across different timescales and helpfully share the termly plans with parents. Teachers plan together with stage partners and teachers across the school. Where children are working at Milestones, teachers have been working with teachers within other additional support need schools to inform planning and professional judgement.

Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

- All staff have a strong understanding of the wellbeing needs of all children. They regularly communicate and work with one another and families very effectively. This collaboration ensures that children experience a caring, nurturing learning environment that meets their current wellbeing needs. Staff make very good use of a range of approaches to support children's wellbeing including feelings check-ins, music therapy and access to calm spaces.

Appropriate GIRFME plans are in place for all children, which support the individual wellbeing needs of children. As a result of these approaches, children feel safe and happy in school.

- Staff have strengthened their approaches to supporting children's sensory needs, working with a range of partners including parents. Through parental fundraising and staff research, a sensory room was successfully established. Children across the LCSC and mainstream benefit from this resource which they access regularly. As a next step, senior leaders and staff should consider how to monitor the impact of pupils' access to the sensory room.
- An assessment tool supports staff in identifying children's emotional wellbeing needs, which helpfully informs planning around emotional support and learning for all children. All children have a clear plan in place that identifies their specific learning needs and have individualised health and wellbeing targets. Regular review and evaluations of these targets, in partnership with parents and partners, helpfully inform next steps. The children engage positively in a range of curriculum-based activities that promote their health and wellbeing, such as physical education, cooking and food-tasting activities.
- Staff have a clear understanding of their role in relation to statutory duties. There are currently no children with a coordinated support plan. All staff are trained in deescalation approaches and appropriate systems and processes are in place to support children when required.
- All children in the LCSC are involved, engaged and included in the life of the school. Staff carefully consider equity of opportunity, for example access to after school clubs. Lunchtime clubs are offered to overcome any barriers to participation.
- Senior leaders and staff have a good understanding of the socio-economic context of the children and their families. Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) enhance's staffing within the LCSC, which further supports children with attainment and inclusion.

Raising attainment and achievement

- Most children are making very good progress in literacy and numeracy. A few are making good progress.
- All children have individual plans and targets in place, and evaluations demonstrate steps in progress over time. Staff currently track children's progress in health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy in relation to Milestones and CfE levels over the course of the year. Senior leaders are at the early stages of establishing a new tracking system which will inform further children's attainment across the curriculum over time.
- Children working at Milestones and pre-early levels apply communication strategies effectively to communicate their needs and choices, for example during play activities. They respond to simple instructions and choose activities that support their learning in areas such as phonics. Children working at early level retell parts of stories in a range of ways including using sign-language or sequencing of pictures. At first level, most children enjoy researching topics of interest using digital tools or books and then creating their own written fact files or stories.
- Children at early level are showing progress in using materials or objects to count to 10. They recognise numbers and a few children write numbers. Most children can identify coins and are

developing their understanding of fractions through sensory experiences. Most children successfully match numbers to quantities. Almost all children copy simple patterns using shapes, objects, colours or numbers. They further develop their understanding of 'before', 'after' and time through daily routines and visual timetables. A few children correctly identify the area of 2D shapes.

- Children are confident and achieve a range of skills through a wide range of activities including litter picking, forest school sessions and educational excursions. Staff and parents regularly share children's holistic achievements via regular communication, online platforms, newsletters, parent and child 'learn together' sessions in and assemblies. Value stickers and awards are given to children instantly when they demonstrate a school value well. Children receive house points alongside peers in mainstream. All achievements are well captured and celebrated for all children.
- Children use communication devices very well and their needs are understood and supported very effectively. Staff are confident in managing autism, they also promote equity of attainment and achievement for all children. Parents value access to bespoke training, delivered by the educational psychologist which has developed their skills and helps them to support their children more effectively at home. Senior leaders and staff support parents in a range of ways, including with referrals to agencies and support with the cost of the school day. This is helping children to access the curriculum and their learning. Effective transition planning supports children in making a smooth transition into the LCSC.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Through self-evaluation, senior leaders identified the need to continue to develop the high-quality ethos and improve further teacher's pedagogy with an increased focus on children being independent learners. To achieve this, the whole school community revisited the vision, values and aims and linked these more effectively to the Gospel values. The school focused on promoting the God given talents of everyone in the school including children and staff. The school is founded on relational trust leading to collective commitment and sustainable change.

Senior leaders researched a range of professional learning and seven members of staff, including the headteacher and depute headteachers undertook a master's level qualification on a student-centred approach to teaching mathematics. Their aim was for children and staff to adopt and open, enquiring mindset to learning. The proportionately high number of staff engaging in the learning together created a learning community, some competitiveness and high levels of motivation to succeed. Staff were enthusiastic about the approach and wanted to go and learn more about how children learned. Senior leaders incorporated this interest into staff professional learning and the school's leadership at all levels began to grow and develop.

The school's success in the project was recognised more widely, and they presented at the Scottish Learning Festival, the Scottish Maths Council and at Stirling University. Children in P1 for example, are empowered to divide and multiply. They create their own word problems and all classes regularly share their learning in class with parents.

Teachers teach a mathematical concept to do with numeracy and through a number problem. A problem that the child will internalise and understand. The teacher does a dynamic assessment and watches what the children are doing and chooses from the least successful strategy to most successful. The solutions are shared and encourages children to talk about their learning. Children feel listened to and started leading their learning by solving problems.

Senior leaders then applied this philosophy about how children learn across all areas of children's learning. Children are supported to learn in different ways and ways that suits their individual learning needs and preferences. Staff are empowered to flourish. There's a shared flow of intelligence and senior leaders have created a skilled workforce and school community with high expectations of what everyone can achieve.

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.