

Summarised inspection findings

Macduff School

Aberdeenshire Council

21 April 2026

Key contextual information

Macduff School is a non-denominational primary school in the town of Macduff in Aberdeenshire. There are 280 children organised across 11 classes. The senior leadership team consists of a headteacher, one full-time and two part-time depute headteachers. The headteacher has been in post since September 2021 and the depute headteachers since August 2015, October 2023 and August 2025. The depute headteachers all have a part-time class commitment. In relation to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), a majority of children live in decile 5. Across the school, 16% of children are in receipt of free school meals. The number of children who require additional support with their learning is 34% and 8% have English as an additional language.

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	

- Led successfully by senior leaders, staff have created and embedded a calm, inclusive and nurturing ethos for learning which is underpinned effectively by children's rights. Staff work well with children to ensure they understand clearly how their rights are upheld across the school, through class charters and a playground charter. Staff and children are proud of the silver national accreditation they have achieved for their work on children's rights. Children articulate well the school values of honesty, kindness and respect. Consequently, children experience a very positive environment for learning which is supporting effectively, engagement and progress in learning.
- All staff are highly responsive to children's emotional needs. Children feel that they are treated fairly and with respect by staff and say staff encourage them to do their best. Staff know children very well and act as positive role models to promote effective and trusting relationships. Most children work well individually, and in groups and pairs where they demonstrate respectful relationships with their peers. Almost all children behave well and engage enthusiastically in their learning.
- Teachers have used a national framework to evaluate and improve classroom environments. For example, staff have reorganised their classrooms to create spaces for children to regulate their emotions and have a choice in where they learn. This is having a positive impact on supporting all children to feel included in learning in their classrooms. A few children demonstrate dysregulated behaviour at times. To address this, staff have created additional spaces within the school such as the chill zone, nurture room and sensory room. In addition, staff use their professional learning around trauma and nurture effectively alongside day to

day supports such as emotional check-ins. This is supporting targeted children well to sustain positive behaviours. As a result, children manage their behaviour effectively in calm and supportive environments which is allowing them to successfully access learning alongside their peers.

- Senior leaders, in collaboration with all stakeholders have created a helpful learning and teaching policy known as 'the high five of learning'. This provides staff with a shared understanding of key aspects of high-quality learning and teaching. Senior leaders evaluate the quality of learning and teaching through established quality assurance processes. These processes include lesson observations and discussions with staff about their practice. Following classroom observations, staff receive appropriate feedback to support their understanding of their strengths and next steps. Senior leaders should continue to use their evaluations to demonstrate whole school progress in achieving high-quality learning and teaching consistently across all classes.
- Teachers provide clear explanations and instructions to support children to undertake learning activities. In almost all lessons, teachers share accurately the purpose of the lesson and provide clarity to children about how they can be successful. In a minority of classes, teachers encourage children to co-create how they can be successful in their learning. Most teachers make links regularly to prior learning which supports children well to develop their understanding and build on previous lessons. Most teachers use questions well to check for understanding and a minority of teachers use questions to stimulate curiosity and creativity. All staff should now develop further their use of higher-order questioning. This should help challenge children's thinking and extend their learning.
- Most teachers use digital technology well to support learning and teaching. They engage children through presentations using interactive whiteboards to support their teaching inputs. Children use software and digital applications effectively to enhance their learning, such as accessing games and learning about coding. Staff support children to use an online platform to document and share their learning with families at home. As planned, senior leaders and staff should develop a digital skills pathway to support children to develop their digital skills progressively and across the curriculum.
- Staff at early level have engaged positively with professional learning around the development of play-based learning to encourage curiosity and promote independence. Children at early level have opportunities to engage regularly in a range of structured play experiences. Teachers make effective use of spaces and resources to support children to apply their learning in play contexts. Teachers should continue to engage with national guidance as they progress further with the development of play pedagogy. In particular, they should look to provide a greater balance of adult-initiated and child-led experiences. As planned, senior leaders need to continue to identify ways to extend this approach across all stages. This should help all children across the school to develop enquiry skills appropriately according to their age and stage.
- Teachers have engaged positively in professional learning to support improvements to children's learning experiences. For example, teachers have developed an effective approach to outdoor learning. All children complete activities based on learning across the curriculum, known as the 'Macduff Quests'. They play a central role in planning these activities. This is

supporting children to build skills in leading their learning, which is increasing confidence and responsibility. There is scope to strengthen further children's abilities to develop their understanding of themselves as learners through activities such as target setting. This should provide children with more opportunities to lead their own learning and gain greater ownership of their next steps.

- Almost all children are developing well their skills in peer and self-assessment. This is helping them to understand when they have been successful and how to improve. Senior leaders and staff have recently developed a helpful feedback policy to provide clarity as to expectations of providing feedback. Teachers provide children with immediate oral feedback which supports children well as they undertake learning. Teachers also provide written feedback to support children to identify strengths and next steps, mainly in writing. As a result, most children feel staff help them to understand how their writing skills are progressing. As a next step, teachers need to consider ways to apply approaches to feedback to other areas of the curriculum. This should support and encourage children to be more reflective in their learning across all subjects.
- Staff have developed a useful assessment policy which includes an assessment calendar. This outlines clearly all assessment expectations across the year. Teachers use a range of summative, diagnostic and standardised assessment activities to assess and gather information about children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers gain a good understanding of children's strengths and development as a result, and they use this information well to inform their planning.
- Teachers engage in a variety of moderation activities both in school and across other schools. They are becoming more confident when making judgements about levels of attainment. Staff should continue as planned, to develop assessments that identify how children apply their learning across the curriculum in new and unfamiliar contexts.
- All teachers use a consistent approach to planning learning in the medium and long-term using a range of cluster and local authority learning pathways. Senior leaders ensure all planning expectations are clear and engage in professional dialogue with teachers about their planning and evaluations. Teachers should now ensure they plan learning to meet the needs of all children, in particular children who require greater challenge in their learning.
- All staff track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing three times across the year. Senior leaders and staff meet regularly to discuss teachers' professional judgements about children's progress and achievements. These discussions support teachers increasing confidence in analysing data. In addition, staff use data well to inform their planning and to identify targeted interventions for children who require additional support with their learning. Senior leaders track the progress of identified groups of children well. For example, they track children who are impacted by poverty, care experienced and those with English as an additional language. As a next step, senior leaders should continue to monitor closely the impact of all planned interventions. This should help them to identify which interventions are supporting them to close attainment gaps.

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, children's attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good.
- Most children at early level achieve expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in all aspects of literacy and numeracy. At first and second level, most children achieve expected CfE levels in numeracy and listening and talking and a majority in writing and reading. Across the school, a few children exceed expected national levels.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- At early level, most children communicate with increasing confidence. They enjoy listening to and discussing stories. Most children at first level communicate clearly to staff and their peers. A few children at first level need to develop their skills in listening and responding to the views of others. At second level, most children ask and answer questions with confidence. They work effectively in group discussions and build effectively on the contributions of their peers. Across the school, all children should plan and deliver presentations to a wider range of audiences more frequently to build their confidence in talking further.

Reading

- Staff have developed successfully a positive reading culture with most children demonstrating an enthusiasm for reading a range of texts. Children talk positively about using the school library where they have regular opportunities to select books to read.
- At early level, most children have built a good understanding of phonics. This is helping them to identify common words and read a variety of words in different contexts. They are not yet confident in identifying fiction and non-fiction books. At first level, the majority of children read fluently and use expression well when reading aloud. They understand the differences between fiction and non-fiction texts and talk confidently about some key features. At second level, children enjoy reading a range of more complex texts. They are building their skills and knowledge in being able to interrogate texts to deepen their understanding. A few children at

first and second level need to develop their awareness of a wider variety of authors and genres.

Writing

- At early level, most children form letters successfully and use their knowledge of sounds to write simple sentences. They now need to write independently more frequently and through play opportunities. At first level, most children write using appropriate vocabulary and punctuation. They talk confidently about nouns, verbs and adjectives and use these correctly in their writing. They now need more opportunities to write for pleasure. At second level, most children write at length for a range of purposes and use more complex vocabulary to successfully engage the reader. They write across different writing styles such as imaginative writing, reports and recounts. Teachers should ensure they engage children in persuasive writing. At first and second level, children should use their feedback to revisit, edit and redraft their writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children identify the number before and after and use strategies to add and subtract within 10. Almost all children recognise, sequence and order numbers within 20. A few children are less confident identifying coins to £2. At first level, almost all children accurately round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They correctly identify the correct coins to pay for items. Most children confidently tell the time using half past, quarter past and quarter to, using both analogue and digital clocks. A few children should revisit their understanding of equivalent fractions. At second level, most children show good awareness of the link between fractions, decimals and percentages and identify, with confidence, ways to calculate distance and time. Overall, the majority of children across the school need to increase their mental agility skills.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children understand simple positional language such as in front, behind, above and below. A minority of children know the difference between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. A minority of children need to learn more about symmetry. At first level, most children use mathematical language correctly to describe the properties of three-dimensional objects such as, side, face and edge. A few children are less confident with direction and compass points. At second level, most children identify a range of angles well. They should now be given opportunities to use mathematical language accurately to describe the properties of three-dimensional objects.

Information handling

- At early level, most children read and answer questions about simple charts. At first level, most children understand and interpret simple bar graphs. At second level, most children discuss the different methods for displaying data, for example, bar graphs and Venn diagrams. At first and second level, children should develop their skills in applying their knowledge to create and display data, including using digital technology.

Attainment over time

- Overall attendance is above the national average and has remained high over time. In session 2024/25 attendance was 95%. Across all stages, 24% of children currently have an absence of 10% or more. The headteacher reviews reasons for absence timeously with families and supports them well to encourage their child to attend school regularly. This approach is helping to improve the attendance of a few children. Senior leaders promote the importance of good attendance to all families through regular communication in newsletters and through social media. Senior leaders should continue to develop their approach to monitoring patterns and trends of attendance. This will support a continued collaborative approach with families and external partners to help ensure attendance remains high. There are no children on part-time timetables.
- Senior leaders track children's progress and attainment effectively over time for literacy and numeracy. Attainment information shows that there has been no consistent improving trend in children's attainment, with marginal rises and falls reported over the years. Senior leaders and staff should review more closely, children's gaps in attainment and measure more robustly, the progress towards closing these gaps. This closer analysis and action, built on children's prior learning and identified needs, should ensure accelerated progress for all children.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff value highly the achievements of children both in and outside of school. Staff celebrate achievements in assemblies, through awards, on displays and through films to highlight children's successes. Children gain skills in leadership, organisation and communication through a variety of leadership roles. For example, children have opportunities to develop skills in areas such as, the pupil council, eco committee, health committee, rights respecters, school photographer and glee ambassadors. Children have planned, organised and led activities such as developing a playground charter, creating class allotments and planning a whole school health week. This is supporting them to contribute effectively to the wider life of the school.
- Children are developing a knowledge of the world around them through the 'Macduff Quests'. These quests provide a helpful platform to support children to understand the relevance of skills taught in school to everyday life. Children benefit from opportunities to link with local community projects such as designs for a new Banff Bridge and developing the local shipyard. As a result of these opportunities, children are developing important skills for learning, life and work successfully. Most children articulate with confidence the skills they are developing and how they can use these in real-life contexts.
- Senior leaders have established systems to monitor children's wider achievement. They use this information successfully to identify children at risk of missing out, in order to signpost appropriate opportunities for them. They should now ensure this tracking information captures the skills children are developing for learning, life and work through their achievements in and outwith the school.
- Children are provided with opportunities to improve their local community through activities such as organising and running the 'Cosy Café in the local church hall. This supports children's understanding of their role in the local community well and what it means to be a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.

Equity for all learners

- All staff understand well the socio-economic background of their children and families. The headteacher reviews the cost of the school day and takes appropriate action as required. For example, staff provide supplies of clothing to ensure that all children can participate fully in all aspects of school life. Senior leaders raise the profile of grants and funding to support reducing costs. The Parent Support Group supports the school by subsidising school trips. This ensures that no child misses out due to financial barriers.
- The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to fund additional staffing to support targeted interventions in health and wellbeing. For example, PEF is used well to provide targeted support for groups and individuals in the nurture base. Senior leaders recognise the need to monitor and gather robust evidence on the impact of all interventions on improving outcomes for identified groups of learners. Going forward, the staff team should use evaluations more effectively to demonstrate how they are closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Other relevant evidence

- Children across the school learn French progressively. In addition, children in P5-7 learn languages such as Doric and Mandarin in blocks of learning. This approach ensures that all children receive their entitlement to the 1+2 languages programme.
- Children across the school experience a broad and balanced religious and moral education curriculum. They engage in religious observance through links with Macduff Parish Church.
- All children receive their full entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education each week.
- All children have weekly access to the well-structured and welcoming school library. They visit the local library and benefit from visits to the school from the librarian. As a result, children are developing well their love of reading.
- The headteacher shares the school's plan for spending PEF with the Parent Council and through newsletter communication. As a next step, the headteacher should involve all parents and children in discussions as to how this funding is spent and to evaluate the impact of planned approaches.

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.