

Summarised inspection findings

Pebbles Academy, Muirkirk

16 June 2026

Key contextual information

Pebbles Academy Muirkirk is an independent special school located in the village of Muirkirk, East Ayrshire. The proprietor is Pebbles Care. The school is registered to provide education for up to 25 secondary aged young people. There are 20 young people on the school roll. All young people are care experienced and have faced significant disruption to their wellbeing and education. Most young people are cross border placements from English local authorities and a minority are placed by Scottish local authorities. Half of the young people reside within Pebbles Care houses with half residing in houses with other care providers.

A Head of Education oversees the strategic work of three Pebbles Care schools, including Pebbles Academy Muirkirk. Pebbles Academy Muirkirk has a headteacher, four teachers, a vocational skills coordinator, an adapt learning practitioner and an education administrator.

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

- Senior leaders and staff have been effective in developing a school culture that reflects well the rights of young people who attend. Most young people who attend school regularly have positive and sustained relationships. Most of these young people engage and participate fully in their learning and are capable to engage in more challenging learning activities. Overall, young people interact positively and are respectful of each other during lessons.
- Almost all young people enrolled in the school, at times, present with significantly dysregulated behaviours often as a result of significantly disrupted educational experiences across all stages of their schooling. Senior leaders and staff apply effectively their professional skills, for example, in therapeutic parenting and physical intervention training. This supports an increasing number of young people to manage their behaviour better. As a result, staff develop high-quality relationships with young people who attend school regularly. This is supporting these young people to remain calm and regulated for most of their time when in school. Staff should continue to work with young people to ensure that their interactions with them are always respectful.
- A minority of young people do not attend school regularly, or at all, as a result of their presenting behaviours or anxiety about attending school. Senior leaders and staff liaise closely with care providers reestablish relationships. However, a few young people remain on limited educational programmes for too long and a few experience a significantly reduced education provision. Senior leaders should now ensure that these young people receive their full entitlement to education during periods when they are unable to be with other young people.
- In most lessons staff provide young people with suitable learning activities. They plan and deliver experiences that are frequently matched well to young people's needs and attainment levels. Staff consider effectively activities that reflect young people's interests. For most young people, this connection between their learning and their interests motivates them as they recognise purpose in the activity. However, young people often have lengthy periods during class where they are not sufficiently focussed on progressive learning activities. Staff now need to ensure that time allocated to learning in school is fully utilised for all young people.
- All staff support young people to use strategies well to reduce their barriers to accessing learning. They ensure, where appropriate, that young people access digital tools or coloured overlays. This approach is helping young people to access their learning tasks with reduced reliance on staff support. However, staff overly structure or support young people too much

during their learning activities. There is a need for staff to enable young people to tackle learning with reduced adult support.

- Staff's approach to delivering learning is matched well to the nurturing approaches that underpin the school values. Staff provide core learning activities predominantly within classroom spaces designed to allow young people to settle into learning quickly and work well individually or in groups. Almost all staff use digital technologies well to introduce learning activities, share the intended learning taking place and importantly to enhance young people's learning experiences. The majority of young people respond well to these predictable classroom experiences and routines across the school day.
- All staff provide young people with clear instructions about the learning they will undertake. This includes consistently sharing intended learning and helping young people establish how successful in their learning they have been. Staff respond to most young people's needs quickly and support them appropriately to make progress in their learning.
- Teachers use baseline and summative assessments well to inform their judgements about young people's progress. They adapt their planning of learning to meet individual young people's needs. Teachers use assessment information well to support them identify the next steps in learning for each learner. As a result, teachers implement strategies at the right time to support most young people to learn successfully.
- The majority of staff use formative assessment approaches well, such as immediate feedback and plenary questioning. However, teachers' use of questioning is frequently focused on knowledge recall rather than promoting higher-order thinking skills. Staff should further develop their use of open and probing questions to promote deeper thinking and understanding. Staff should promote independence in learning by encouraging young people to regularly self-assess themselves and to peer assess one another where appropriate.
- At the senior phase, teachers follow the school verification policy thoroughly which details the processes for verification for National Qualifications (NQ). As a result, they have an appropriate understanding of Qualifications Scotland assessment standards. Senior leaders and staff should continue to build on the policy and approaches to moderation within the broad general education (BGE). They need to more clearly set out a strategic outline of the moderation arrangements at the BGE phase, including how teachers will work with colleagues outwith the school. This will support teachers to understand further the national standards through engaging in more frequent and strategic moderation activity beyond the school.
- All teachers plan learning together over different timescales including daily, weekly and termly plans. They use national progression frameworks appropriately to inform their planning, learning and assessment. Staff plan particularly effectively in literacy and numeracy. Across the school, most teachers plan well for each lesson, detailing clearly the learning intentions, success criteria, start, main tasks and plenary. Most staff involve learners effectively to plan their learning, for example by co-creating how they will be successful in their learning activities.
- All young people have suitable individualised education programmes (IEPs). Young people's IEPs detail how staff can support them and provides a useful overview of assessments relating to additional support needs. As a next step, staff should ensure that targets within the IEPs are

linked better to assessment information. They should consider including measurable outcomes and teaching approaches required to deliver outcomes.

- Senior leaders have recently introduced a whole-school tracking system which has potential to capture robustly young people's progress in learning. They are at the earliest stages of tracking academic progress for each learner using the new system. Senior leaders and staff should continue to fully implement this new system and work together to ensure all staff can analyse the data to inform next steps in learning for all.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the proprietor.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

- At the BGE, the majority of young people are making good progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. A few make very good progress from their prior levels. A minority of young people are not making sufficient progress in literacy and numeracy due to attendance, late coming or part-time school timetables. Overall, young people are making better progress in literacy than they are in numeracy. Senior leaders and teachers should now work to improve young people's numeracy progression through the BGE phase.
- In recent years, at the senior phase, most young people attained an SQA NQ English unit or course award at National 3 level or above. A majority of young people have attained an SQA National 3 or National 4 Application of Mathematics unit award. A few young people are making progress at National 5 level. A minority of young people are making limited progress in gaining awards in both English or mathematics. A few are at risk of leaving with no qualifications in English or mathematics.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Young people's attainment in literacy and English is strongest in listening and talking and writing. Young people need further support to improve their attainment, particularly in reading.

Listening and Talking

- Young people are developing their listening and talking skills well within a range of contexts. At second level, young people confidently discuss ideas for individual projects they are undertaking with both adults and their peers. At third level, learners effectively engage in discussions for functional purposes, expressing their ideas clearly and responding appropriately to others.

Reading

- The majority of young people confidently discuss characters and their actions after listening to extracts of a story. Young people build skills in comprehension and empathy well. Young people read with growing confidence and are beginning to explore how some writers use language and imagery, for example by discussion quotations. Young people have key time each day to participate in focussed reading time, however their engagement is variable. Staff have recently introduced a reading award to promote reading for enjoyment. They should continue to promote this to improve young people's interest and motivation to read.

Writing

- The majority of young people write clearly for different purposes, such as, acrostic poetry, short stories and reflecting pieces. They create formal pieces of writing, for example reports about events they have been involved in. They use paragraphs well to organise ideas. Young people enjoy handwriting to convey information but have the choice of access to a digital device if they choose to do so. Staff should continue to promote writing across the school for all young people and develop their skills to write more extended pieces for a range of purposes.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- The majority of young people are making good progress in numeracy and Mathematics. A minority of young people are making limited progress, and there is potential for them to achieve more.

Number, money and measure

- The majority of young people develop confidence in working with whole numbers and fractions and are applying their skills to solve problems. They add, subtract, multiply and divide confidently using mental and written strategies. Young people solve multi-step mathematical problems well, including those that require choosing appropriate operations. They convey that they understand factors, multiples and squares. A few young people are ready to have their learning in number, money and measure accelerated further and can achieve more.

Shape, position and movement

- The majority of young people are developing well their understanding of shape, position and movement in the context of creating characters for animations. These creative opportunities support young people to develop their skills in recognising and using two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. It helps them develop further knowledge of spatial awareness, geometric understanding, and basic computational thinking. The majority of young people confidently identify types of angles by measure. They use protractors and explore angles relationships within polygons accurately.

Information handling

- The majority of young people collect and organise data carefully, and they answer questions relevant to the data. They confidently organise data within tally charts, pictographs and lists. Young people organise larger and more complex data within frequency tables and bar graphs. They confidently describe trends and patterns observed from the data collected. Young people would benefit from continuing to develop their understanding of probability, appropriate to their level.

Attainment over time

- The majority of young people in the BGE make appropriate progress with their attainment over time. They are developing their learning progressively across most curricular areas. Senior leaders and staff are at the earliest stages of using the new tracking system to gather data to help measure young people's progress. They should continue to gather this data and analyse it to ensure young people have continuity onto their senior phase pathways. Staff need to ensure that all young people make progress across all areas of the curriculum, particularly young people that have low attendance or a part-time placement at school.
- The majority of young people within the senior phase have successfully gained or are on track to gain, an appropriate and relevant range of Qualifications Scotland NQ awards from

National 3 through to National 5. Young people gain awards across a range of subjects including modern studies, criminology, physical education and science. Senior leaders and staff should now explore ways to engage further the minority of learners who are not on track with their progress. These young people are at risk of not gaining the range of awards that they potentially could. They face the possibility of leaving school with no qualifications.

- School attendance this session is 78%. The majority of young people are improving their attendance when compared to previous educational placements. A minority of young people who have had a longer placement at the school have continued to improve their attendance over time. However, a minority of young people who have had a longer placement at the school have attendance rates that have regressed. A minority of young people have regular patterns of late coming. Their late coming is frequently affected by not adhering to morning routines at home and by the requirement to travel to school over longer distances. Senior leaders should work with staff and care providers to ensure that all young people establish and sustain positive patterns of attendance and arrival at school on time.
- Senior leaders are working well to improve the accuracy of recording attendance, late coming and exclusion. They monitor attendance rates and work with care providers to ensure young people are safe when not in school. Senior leaders are fully aware of the challenges facing those young people who do not attend school regularly. They follow local procedures appropriately to support a minority of young people to attend school as best as possible. For young people with very low attendance, senior leaders should consider developing further creative approaches to increase young people's participation in educational activities.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- The majority of young people have had significant success in developing the skills required to develop positive relationships which helps them access learning. They still require support to help them manage changes and unexpected transitions across the school day. However, overall, they have developed their resilience and capacity to regulate better as a result of the nurturing experiences provided by staff.
- Overall, the majority of young people apply well the skills required to help them prepare for life after school. They develop teamwork and decision-making skills through pupil council activities and gain important digital and life skills that help them succeed at college. Senior leaders and staff work well with young people to identify their strengths. As a result, young people are very proud of the progress they make, for example, in sports, art and animations, community partnerships and vocational programmes. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to improve tracking of skills, expand employer partnerships and embed employability skills across the curriculum.
- Young people are developing well their understanding of how to be responsible at school. The pupil council have agreed standards and expectations with staff for wearing uniforms and participation in class lessons. They have agreed how the school rewards system, 'Reach For The Stars', can incentivise, promote and reward expected standards. However, there is a need for senior leaders and staff to now work better to ensure that young people embed their rights through the pupil council meetings and rewards systems. Currently there is an overreliance upon young people's compliance with expectations and rules.

Equity for all learners

- A majority of young people are improving their outcomes as a result of attending the school. They are significantly increasing their participation in education and progressing well with reducing identified attainment gaps. Senior leaders ensure that any barriers to learning are addressed well for a majority of young people. They work with young people to source resources they require to succeed in their learning. For example, they help young people access and utilise a pupil premium fund to purchase digital devices that young people use across all aspects of their learning, including further education programmes. Additionally, they use these funds, complimented by school funds, to ensure young people get access to therapeutic supports or equipment, as appropriate to their needs.
- The minority of young people enrolled at the school do not yet receive sufficient time with teachers to benefit fully from education. This is predominantly due to the school, care provider and the placing local authority agreeing reductions of time, or part time placements at school. This often links to serious incidents or young people's school refusal, anxiety or periods of exclusion. Senior leaders should consider developing approaches to ensure that all young people's entitlements to high-quality teaching are met. In doing so, young people will be supported better to benefit fully from their education.
- The school provides young people with learning over a timetable that is less than that of other young people nationally. They should develop the timetable further to ensure young people receive the same opportunities as other young people in Scotland.

Other relevant evidence

- Senior leaders and staff should reduce the use of food to promote engagement or reward actions. Where food is required across the school day, senior leaders and staff should align this with healthy eating programmes and utilise healthy alternatives.
- A minority of local authorities place young people at the school on a part-time basis. As a result, these young people do not have their full entitlement to education met. The school is able to provide a full-time educational experience for these young people if education authorities require access.
- Young people are learning British Sign Language as their additional language. Senior leaders should work with young people to identify a second modern language to learn progressively during their time at school.
- Young people learn about other religions and its place in a modern society.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.