

Summarised inspection findings

Dalmilling Primary School

South Ayrshire Council

25 February 2025

Key contextual information

Dalmilling Primary School is a non-denominational school located in Ayr. The school roll is 300 children with 12 classes and two nurture classes. Almost 90% of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones 1 and 2. Just under a half of children are recorded as having identified additional support needs. Prior to session 2024/25, the school had an Extended Learning Facility (ELF) for 30 children with moderate to complex additional support needs. The ELF was relocated to another primary school and the children attending the facility are no longer on the Dalmilling Primary school roll. The senior leadership team comprises a headteacher and two depute headteachers.

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	

- All staff work together well to create a school-wide, inclusive environment that supports children to communicate. Staff make very effective use of nurturing approaches ensuring that the school's 'communication friendly' environment is underpinned by supportive relationships and interactions. Children feel safe, listened to and able to express themselves. They are motivated to learn and benefit from the school's welcoming and caring ethos that enables them to grow and develop.
- Last session, staff worked collaboratively to build and support further relationships and children's behaviour across the school. For example, they provided visual timetables in all classrooms, and introduced the use of soft lighting and accessible, calm areas to help children with emotional regulation. Children now show greater enthusiasm for their learning and there has been an increase in attendance levels. Overall, children's behaviour has also improved, with a reduction in the number of serious incidents recorded. During lessons, when a few children lose attention or demonstrate dysregulated behaviour, teachers support them well to re-engage. This minimises any disruptions to classroom learning. Children are kind to one another and understand some of the emotional challenges that their peers may face. They are aware of the wide range of strategies and supports used in their school to help support positive behaviour.
- The senior leadership team prioritise professional learning that helps staff to develop high-quality approaches to learning and teaching. Working with staff, they have created 'The Dalmilling Way', a clear framework which details agreed approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. All teachers now take full account of these agreed 'non-negotiable' strategies when planning for learning and teaching. The framework sets out the expected features teachers must include in lessons, such as engaging starters sharing the purpose of learning and using plenaries to summarise. 'The Dalmilling Way' expected features are now evident in almost all classes and this is improving the consistency of quality learning and teaching across the school. Following training, staff also use a range of digital technologies and tools in

engaging and interactive ways to support learning and teaching. They use software and applications well to support individual children who are struggling with aspects of their learning. Children are very positive about the improvements to their classroom experiences and how they learn. They describe examples of their increased engagement and motivation.

- Teaching staff have been involved in an 'adaptive learning and teaching' national pilot programme and now implement these approaches when teaching reading and numeracy. Staff align these adaptive teaching approaches very well with 'The Dalmilling Way' framework. As a result, effective approaches to teaching of reading and numeracy are consistently implemented across the whole school. Building on this positive work, the senior leadership team and staff now need to ensure that children's attainment and progress through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels is rigorously monitored on an ongoing basis. This should be closely linked to national Benchmarks. Currently, lessons provide coverage and breadth across CfE experiences and outcomes, however, the pace of learning is not always well-matched to children's needs. For a few children, the pace is too slow and, for a few others, is too fast.
- Young children are motivated and engage well in play-based activities that support them to be curious and creative. At early level, teachers have developed their use of interesting provocations to support children's literacy and numeracy learning. They make effective use of spaces and the environment to enhance children's experiences. As a next step, staff should consider how to embed further literacy and numeracy learning across the curriculum during play. Staff provide children with a range of responsive and planned adult-initiated play experiences and activities. They should consider how to increase opportunities for child-led play to meet the needs of each child most effectively. Teachers are developing their skills in observing and assessing learning during play. They are gathering evidence through observations and should increasingly use this information for planning children's next steps in learning. Teachers should continue to engage in professional learning on the principles of play and share their knowledge and passion with colleagues across the school.
- All teachers implement effectively agreed, comprehensive approaches to assessment in literacy and numeracy. They are confident and accurate in their professional judgements of children's achievement of CfE levels. The senior leadership team and teachers monitor children's periodic assessment information well through monitoring and tracking meetings. Staff also hold 'team around the child' and 'team around the class' discussions regularly. During these sessions, senior leaders, teachers, support staff and partners meet to consider how best to support individual children's progress as well as each class as a whole. This approach to partnership working impacts very positively on individual children's experiences as well as whole school outcomes.
- The senior leadership team have comprehensive planning processes in place which include termly overviews. Teachers use progression frameworks for each curricular area to inform their short-term, medium-term and long-term planning. This is supporting children to build on their prior learning as they move through CfE levels. At times, the use of whole class teaching for particular subject areas is not meeting the needs of all children. Staff should revisit this approach to consider how they can reduce barriers to learning or provide further challenge. A few teachers need to ensure that they make greater use of their knowledge of children's additional support needs and individual targets when planning learning outwith literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders should help teachers to support and evaluate children's progress towards their targets across a range of curricular areas.

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, 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

- Attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. Overall, most children are expected to achieve nationally expected CfE levels in literacy. The majority of children are expected to achieve nationally expected levels in numeracy at key stages. Whilst overall attainment levels are improving, there remains a need for staff to continue their focus on raising attainment.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards their individual learning targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English. The majority of children facing barriers to their learning make good progress toward national expectations in reading and a minority achieve nationally expected levels in writing.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children listen well to adults and one another in a range of contexts. At early level, children respond well to adults and peers during play and answer simple questions. At first level, children listen to others' opinions and talk and listen well during discussions in pairs and groups. At second level, children apply the skills they have learned when presenting to their class, for example, sharing information about natural disasters. A few children use appropriate intonation and expression in their voice to engage their audience. Almost all children would benefit from support to recognise the talking and listening skills they are developing and to apply these skills across other areas of the curriculum.

Reading

- Reading has been a whole school priority area for improvement. Staff are applying professional learning to improve the teaching of reading and children engage well with experiences and activities from 'South Ayrshire Reads', a local authority initiative. Across the school, children enjoy participating in class 'story and snack' time with their teachers. More children now value reading for enjoyment and most children are reading with increasing fluency. At early level, most children recognise initial sounds and are beginning to blend combinations of letters. At first level, most children answer questions about texts confidently and demonstrate a sound understanding of the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. Across first and second levels, almost all children explain their reasons for choosing certain books from the library. A few children name their preferred authors and can justify their preferences. At second level, the majority of children make accurate predictions about their texts. They are confident in the difference between fact and opinion and recognise and

answer literal and inferential questions. Children would benefit from further support to identify and discuss the techniques authors use to influence the reader.

Writing

- All children across the school write regularly and at increasing length. At early level, most children form letters correctly and, with support, use capital letters, full stops and finger spaces appropriately. They would benefit from further practice writing independently, for example, through play experiences. At first level, children write appropriately for a variety of purposes, often linked to their contexts for learning. Most children select the right format and include relevant information when writing non-fiction texts. For example, they can write instructions for a specific purpose. They are confident in their use of connectives and simple punctuation, including exclamation marks. At second level, most children are gaining confidence including speech with the appropriate punctuation within their writing. They recognise figurative language, such as similes, metaphors and alliteration, and a few children understand the use of onomatopoeia. Across the school, children should continue to build their confidence identifying the features of different types of texts and practice applying these appropriately in their own writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most children, including those recorded as having additional support needs and barriers to learning, are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Across the school, children are benefitting from the use of concrete materials to understand new concepts and when solving numerical problems.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children are confident with number formation and simple addition. They count accurately forwards and backwards in sequence. Children are continuing to develop their knowledge and understanding of number, money and measure through teacher-directed play experiences. At first level, most children demonstrate mental agility appropriate for their stage. They use estimation and rounding skills well and explain their processes for solving number operations, such as addition and multiplication. Children are less confident working with division. Most children working towards second level, identify the steps needed when solving word problems and carry out calculations confidently and accurately. They apply their knowledge and skills in number and money well in real-life contexts. They would benefit from further practice linking mathematical concepts, such as fractions, decimals and percentages.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children identify two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They use language of position and movement when playing games, including behind, in front of, above and below. At first level, most children identify more than one line of symmetry and create their own symmetrical pictures and designs. Most children working towards second level, classify a range of angles confidently including acute, obtuse, straight and reflex. They are using digital technology to enhance their learning in this area. For example, they are developing their understanding of coding and applying this knowledge to make a robot follow simple directions.

Information handling

- At early level, children use their knowledge of colour, shape, size and other properties to match and sort items in a variety of different ways. At first level, children gather and display data using tally marks and block graphs. At second level, children require more experiences to extend the range of ways they collect, organise and display data, including through the use of digital technologies. Across the school, children should continue to build their skills in

information handling. They need to apply their skills regularly for meaningful and authentic purposes.

Attainment over time

- The senior leadership team and staff track children's progress in literacy and numeracy regularly using a school-wide system. Staff analyse attainment data along with assessment information as a school and through collaboration with cluster schools. This supports staff to have a shared understanding of national standards and continues to support their professional judgements. This approach has increased teachers' confidence in gathering supportive evidence of children's attainment and progress, and their understanding of data from their own class. Although the school's overall attainment levels over time have been variable, recent data now shows an improving pattern for both literacy and numeracy.
- Senior leaders tracking data shows that the majority of children's progress at key stages is meeting CfE expected levels and national Benchmarks. Almost all children, including children with barriers to learning, sustain good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. The senior leadership team should now monitor the progress of specific groups of children, such as gender, those who have experienced care and more able learners. Working with teachers, they should use this information when planning to ensure all children are making the progress they are capable of and achieving their full potential.

Attendance

- The headteacher has robust procedures in place to monitor and track attendance, for the whole school and for individuals who are at risk of poor attendance. When required, the headteacher and Education Welfare Officer ensure there is regular communication between the school and families to provide support and help to improve children's attendance. Children are aware of the importance of attendance at school, and this is discussed at assemblies regularly. As a result of a school-wide focus and interventions, overall attendance levels are improving.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff ensure children's achievements are recognised and celebrated in a variety of ways. For example, they highlight these at assemblies, through 'Star of the Week' and 'Class Star' awards and on school displays. Staff actively encourage parents to provide information about their child's achievements from clubs or home-life and share these widely with the school community.
- Staff ensure all children are provided with rich experiences beyond the classroom and within the community. This supports children to develop a range of skills and to be successful. For example, children participate in class trips, 'outdoor learning week' and the local 'Dundonald Gymnastics'. Children also participate with enthusiasm in a range of school and community activities or groups. This includes youth clubs, football, handball and mountain biking. Across the school, all children participate in 'Junior Duke Awards'. Staff use these awards to encourage children to take part in activities and events and to provide recognition for their achievements. Children talk about these experiences with passion and are able to identify the skills they have developed.
- Recently, staff have developed a participation and achievement tracker to help identify children who require further support and encouragement to participate. They track and monitor engagement in activities and experiences to ensure all children are included, particularly those at risk of missing out. As planned, staff should continue to support children to identify the skills

they are developing during their experiences. This should help children to develop and link a wide range of skills for work, life and learning.

- The junior leadership team have identified attendance and the playground as two areas of improvement needed in their school. They are working with their house groups to address these and are actively seeking views from all children. The junior leadership team have been successful in securing new playground markings to help children play more games during break and lunchtime. Staff should continue to provide leadership opportunities for children across the school. They should support children's leadership and involvement within a number of school priority areas, such as healthy eating, reading, anti-racism and children's rights.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher has a clear plan for the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The headteacher uses PEF to employ additional staff, such as early years practitioners and support staff, and to access the support of partner organisations. The additional staff provide targeted support across the school for children at risk of not achieving their potential. Children benefit from this range of targeted support. There are examples of positive outcomes, such as increased attainment, greater levels of achievement and improved social and emotional wellbeing. The headteacher also allocates PEF to support families facing difficulties with the cost of outings, residential excursions, and school resources. Staff have outlined approaches to reduce and support the 'cost of the school day' clearly for families within a school policy. These actions help to ensure all children access a full range of learning experiences alongside their peers. As planned, senior staff need to develop their use of tracking further to demonstrate the impact of PEF interventions more clearly on outcomes for children.
- All staff are aware of the socio-economic and emotional circumstances for individual children and families. Staff use their knowledge of children's needs to deliver targeted interventions for individuals and groups within literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. A few children also benefit from attending group sessions, such as nurture support, or work closely with partner organisations. These approaches are providing valuable support and help children build confidence with their learning and feel more settled in their class.

Other relevant evidence

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Minor areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.
- As part of whole school approaches to raising attainment in reading, staff have increased the range and number of fiction and non-fiction texts available for children to read. They have also developed reading zones around the school and provided further resources for staff and children to use. As a result, children are more motivated to read and there an increased school-wide culture of reading for enjoyment.
- The headteacher has discussed plans for PEF with the recently appointed chair of the Parent Council and consults with staff, the wider Parent Council and P7 children on the use of this funding. As planned, senior leaders should extend their consultations and engage more parents and other stakeholders in sharing their views on PEF spending and evaluation.
- Staff provide children with two hours of high-quality of physical education per week. In addition, they work closely with Active Schools staff and partner with a local activity centre to offer children further opportunities for physical activity.
- From P5 to P7, all children receive French lessons regularly in class. They are building on their vocabulary and skills progressively over time.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The senior leadership team and staff have a relentless focus on improving school attendance. They have developed a clear strategy and employ a range of whole school and targeted approaches effectively to ensure as many children as possible are supported to attend. This work is underpinned by a strong staff understanding of the root causes of low attendance. They use this knowledge to plan and provide well-considered interventions that address the symptoms underlying non-attendance. Senior leaders and the Education Welfare Officer provide sensitive and thoughtful support for individual families. They have also developed whole school initiatives to support attendance. Examples include running and analysing parental surveys, creating helpful displays, use of attendance meetings and signposting available support. They also worked on developing a community food and household items bank that families can access. The senior leadership team reviewed children's weekly timetables and raised staff awareness of the importance of providing consistent engaging learning for children. As a result of information gained from a focused review of attendance patterns, staff timetabled more motivational learning experiences. For example, P7 children participated in a theatre production delivered over a period of ten weeks in partnership with the local theatre company. Staff also provide a daily 'walking bus' that supports children to walk to school.

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.