

Summarised inspection findings

Mulbuie Primary School

The Highland Council

15 September 2026

Key contextual information

Mulbuie Primary School is a non-denominational primary school, situated in the Muir or Ord on the Black Isle peninsula in the Highlands. The school has a shared headship with another primary school.

At the time of inspection, the school roll consisted of 44 children across two classes, with three teachers supporting learning. A minority of children are registered for free school meals. Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 5-10. The school reported that approximately one-third of children require additional support with their learning. There are currently no children in the school who have English as an additional language.

Staffing comprises of a headteacher, 0.9 teacher, one 0.8 and one 0.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers, and two support assistants. Between January and March 2026, the school was led on a temporary basis through a shared leadership arrangement with a headteacher from within the local associated schools' group. A new acting headteacher was appointed at the end of April 2026. The acting headteacher had been in post for six weeks at the time of the inspection.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak
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 benefit from a learning environment where staff strive to create a positive ethos. Almost all children feel safe, supported and respected at school. Children demonstrate the cluster wide values of 'respectful, achieving, inclusive, safe and encouraging'. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They support children well to understand their rights and link these rights to the school values. Staff are increasingly embedding articles on the values and rights of the child into children's everyday experiences.
- Overall, there is not a consistently high quality of teaching, learning and assessment across lessons. Teachers have recently engaged in professional learning to improve the quality of learning and teaching. However, this professional learning is not yet applied consistently. In the majority of lessons, children's learning lacks sufficient pace and challenge. As a result, the majority of children become disengaged from their learning and low-level disruption occurs. All teachers should now ensure that all learning is purposeful, well-paced and consistently matched to children's needs.
- Teachers have recently developed a learning and teaching standard. This is at the early stages of helping all teachers structure their lessons to support learning. All teachers share the

purpose of learning with children routinely. Most children describe what they are learning. However, a minority of children rely on the teacher's explanation rather than demonstrating their own understanding. A minority of children across the school are not always clear about the steps required to be successful. Teachers should ensure children consistently have a clearer understanding of what they need to do to be successful.

- In the majority of lessons, teachers' instructions and explanations are clear. In a few lessons, teachers' instructions for tasks are overly prescriptive, which limits children's ability to take ownership of their learning. Teachers should reduce over-direction and provide opportunities for children to make choices and lead their learning more independently.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning well to check children's understanding. In a few lessons, open questions are used effectively to deepen learning. Teachers should build on this practice to develop higher-quality questioning more consistently across the school.
- Teachers are at an early stage in considering how learning environments, interactions and the use of space can support high-quality play. Further work is required to ensure learning through play is purposeful, progressive and clearly focused on improving outcomes for all children. Teachers should ensure that all play opportunities allow children to deepen and enrich their learning. As planned, teachers should liaise with local authority and nursery colleagues and engage with national research and guidance to develop their understanding of play-based learning.
- Children across the school access online games to consolidate learning successfully. A few children use assistive technology or programmes that are personalised to reinforce their learning. Older children use devices well for research and to present their work. Teachers should develop further the use of devices to provide more regular opportunities to use technology to enhance children's learning and progressively build digital skills.
- Children have access to a well-equipped outdoor area. They participate in regular outdoor physical education (PE) and groups of children work with staff to grow plants. Staff need to develop outdoor learning further to ensure all children benefit from structured, progressive learning experiences beyond the classroom.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning benefit from targeted support. Support staff work collaboratively with teachers to plan and deliver interventions, particularly for children who need to consolidate their learning. They provide effective support for children in small groups, which helps to enhance their progress.
- All teachers give positive encouragement to children. In the majority of lessons teachers use a few formative assessment strategies well to make judgements about children's understanding. A minority of children receive brief written feedback about their progress in a variety of curriculum areas. Older children create termly targets to support their progress, with the majority reflecting regularly on these. This increasingly supports children to take ownership of their learning. However, in the majority of lessons, teachers do not use formative assessment strategies to adapt teaching or respond to learning needs. Teachers should further develop a more consistent approach to formative assessment. They should ensure feedback is effective, focuses on improvement and strengthens children's progress.

- Teachers have developed an assessment calendar which is beginning to support a shared understanding of the evidence required to demonstrate children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. A range of summative assessments, including national, local authority and commercially produced assessments, are undertaken across the year. However, teachers do not yet use assessment information consistently to inform planning and ensure appropriate pace and progression in learning for all children.
- Approaches to planning for learning are an important weakness across the school. Teachers plan over different timescales, including annual overviews and termly plans. They use a range of curriculum pathways, including local authority frameworks and school-developed materials. However, these planning tools are not sufficiently streamlined, resulting in duplication and limited breadth and progression in children's learning. In addition, planning is not yet consistently well-developed across the school. This results in short term planning of learning that is not matched to children's differing stages and abilities, limiting progress for a minority of children. Teachers should now develop more purposeful and coherent approaches to planning. They should ensure planning takes clearer account of progression and provides appropriate learning for all children.
- The headteacher meets teachers termly to monitor and discuss individual children's progress. Teachers identify barriers to learning and plan targeted interventions. They record progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing using a recently developed digital tracking tool. Although this tool has the potential to support a clearer understanding of children's progress, current data collected is not yet consistently reliable. As a result, teachers do not have a fully accurate overview of children's attainment and progress across the school. The headteacher should now work with teachers to ensure all data is accurate, supports effective tracking of progress, and informs timely targeted interventions.

2.1 Safeguarding

- During the inspection the education authority, with the school, have taken forward areas for improvement in safeguarding which required urgent action. HM Inspectors have reviewed information relating to these areas for improvement. HM Inspectors are satisfied with the response taken by the education authority and do not require any further information.

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

- The number of children at each stage varies and is relatively small. Overall statements have been made about attainment and progress to ensure individual children are not identified.
- Overall children's attainment in literacy and English is satisfactory and in mathematics is good.
- The majority of children who require additional support with their learning are making satisfactory progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, the majority of children are making satisfactory progress. A minority of children are not making sufficient progress.

Listening and talking

- Most younger children ask and answer simple questions about stories. They take turns when speaking in small groups, with support. A minority of younger children are not yet able to follow staff instructions. Most older children take relevant notes using their own words. They explain techniques to engage a listener when presenting to their class confidently. A few are not yet skilled in building on others' ideas during small group discussions.

Reading

- The majority of younger children answer simple questions successfully about books they are reading. They make simple predictions about characters and stories confidently. A minority of children are not yet able to read words accurately using their phonic knowledge, which slows their reading progress. Most older children read clearly and use expression well to enhance their reading skills. They answer different types of questions accurately and explain their thinking. They do not yet have a deep understanding of authors' techniques that keep the reader interested. A few are reluctant to tackle unfamiliar words.

Writing

- Most younger children write their own names well. A minority are beginning to write simple words independently. A few are beginning to write sentences. For the majority of younger children, the pace of developing writing skills is too slow and they do not make sufficient progress. Teachers should now review and strengthen approaches to teaching early writing to ensure children make more timely progress. Most older children create well organised

paragraphs that are correctly punctuated. They write in a variety of genres with relevant information and structures. A few older children are not yet confident in using spelling strategies to write unfamiliar words.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making good progress. A minority of children are capable of achieving more.

Number, money and measure

- Most younger children count confidently and recognise number sequences within 20. A few children recognise and count beyond this. Most younger children recognise odd and even numbers with increasing accuracy. Most children are not yet confident in reading digital and analogue clocks. Older children confidently discuss place value and explain the link between a digit and its value to 1,000,000 and how to use zero as a placeholder. The majority of children effectively use strategies to estimate and make calculations accurately. They round numbers to 10, 100 and 1,000. They are beginning to process equations with growing confidence. The majority of older children require further practice in using fractions, decimals and percentages and calculating area and perimeter.

Shape, position and movement

- Most younger children name and describe correctly, properties of basic two-dimensional shapes. They are not yet able to name three-dimensional objects. The majority of children use positional language such as 'above' and 'below' and 'forwards' but are less confident with 'left' and 'right'. Almost all older children demonstrate their understanding of positional language associated with direction and turning. Across the school, children need to use correct mathematical language when describing shapes and objects.

Information handling

- Most younger children collect a range of data and objects and sort them into sets. They interpret simple charts to answer questions. They are not yet able to identify different ways of presenting information. Older children describe a variety of ways to display data. They need further opportunities to identify the key features of a bar chart to help them interpret the data effectively. Across the school all children need further experience of using digital technology to present information.

Attainment over time

- Progress for younger children in literacy and English is too slow and requires improvement. By the time children reach P7 progress has improved. However, overall children make insufficient progress across their time in school in literacy and English. Children make better progress in numeracy and mathematics over time.
- The acting headteacher recognises that teacher's professional judgements are not consistently accurate across the school. Approaches to evidencing progression across learners' full learning journey remain underdeveloped. As a result, the school is not yet able to evidence learners' progress consistently across all stages. Teachers should now engage more fully in moderation activities to develop a shared understanding of achievement of a level across all stages of the school. In addition, the headteacher should develop a clear and manageable system to help teachers track attainment over time accurately and confidently. Teachers should use this

information systematically to set high expectations, plan next steps, and increase the pace of attainment over time.

- Attendance at school is currently 91.77%, which is below the national figure. This does not fully reflect the wider school attendance pattern, with only a few children persistently absent. Staff rigorously track attendance and work proactively with families to help remove any barriers to school attendance successfully. They should continue this valuable work to maintain these positive approaches to attendance at school. Where flexible timetables are used the headteacher ensures that these are reviewed regularly with parents and partners to encourage increased time spent at school. A few children are provided with online activities to prevent lost learning, when plans to return to school take more time.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- The acting headteacher recently introduced a system for parents to share children's achievements from home. This is helping teachers to develop a fuller picture of children's achievements. Staff also celebrate wider achievements through assemblies and certificates. Children record these achievements in profiles shared with parents. As a result, children take pride and talk enthusiastically about their successes. The headteacher should now proceed with plans to reintroduce tracking of children's participation in clubs, groups and activities to ensure all children are included.
- All children take on meaningful roles that develop their leadership skills and contribute positively to their sense of achievement. These roles help children act responsibly and experience success. For example, reading champions created an outdoor book activity walk for the wider community to enjoy. Children were very proud of the positive feedback received from those who used the walk. Children value these roles and speak confidently about their contributions.

Equity for all learners

- Staff understand the context of their school well and sensitively support families to reduce the cost of the school day. For example, they provide uniforms, snacks and financial support for subsidised residential trips where needed. As a result, barriers to participation are reduced and children are better supported to engage fully in school life.
- The headteacher has developed a detailed plan for the use of the school's Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). However, this funding is not yet having a sufficient impact on improving attainment or closing gaps in learning. Too many children continue to experience gaps in their learning, and current use of PEF funded support is not effectively addressing this. The headteacher should ensure PEF is used more effectively to secure measurable improvements in outcomes and reduce poverty-related attainment gaps.

Other relevant evidence

- Children receive two hours of PE each week. This takes place in the village church hall or outside. In a few lessons, PE is not of a sufficiently high-quality, with a few children not participating in lessons. Teachers should support children to engage more fully in progressive PE programmes to develop a wide range of social, physical and wellbeing skills.
- Children across the school learn French and Spanish in line with national policy.
- The headteacher provides information for parents and the Parent Council on school improvement planning and progress. This includes a general outline of PEF spending. The headteacher should explore ways to consult more meaningfully with children and families on how PEF is used to reduce poverty-related attainment gaps.
- Children receive their entitlement to religious education and observance in line with national expectations. Children are visited by the local clergy in person and online on a regular basis. The attend services in the local church.

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.