

Summarised inspection findings

Crathes School

Aberdeenshire Council

17 June 2025

Key contextual information

Crathes School is a non-denominational school in rural Aberdeenshire. It serves the village of Crathes and surrounding rural area. At the time of inspection, there were 42 children on the school roll. Children are taught as two multi-stage classes P1-3 and P4-7.

School facilities are spread across a number of buildings. The main building has two classrooms and a third temporary classroom is sited in the playground. A school house hosts the main office, a kitchen, dining room and school library. Outdoors, there is a large grass playing field, a wildlife garden with polytunnel, a picnic area and a tarred playground. The headteacher, 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE), and an acting headteacher, 0.2 FTE, make up the school senior leadership team. Staffing includes several teachers, visiting specialists and support staff who work closely with the leadership team.

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

- A shared aspirational vision and well-considered school values underpin the daily life and work at Crathes School. Staff, partners and parents work together very well to ensure a nurturing and inclusive ethos. Senior leaders and teachers work closely with children to uphold a rights-based learning approach. Children create charters to share expectations of conduct during lessons and when in the playground. Staff use these well along with school values to promote and support positive relationships. Children behave well and demonstrate kindness and empathy for others. They thrive in a positive, caring environment where adults and peers support them very well.
- Almost all children work well independently, in pairs and in groups. They are confident to tackle new learning activities and experiences. Most children are motivated, attentive and engage fully in their lessons.
- Recently, senior leaders and the school community revised the curriculum rationale. This is used very well by staff to inform and guide teaching and learning approaches. It ensures children regularly learn through real-life contexts linked to their local area. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning is identified as a key driver in the curriculum. Staff have embedded this successfully across the school. For example, through a school-wide electric go-kart project, children investigate, test theories and work within a design brief linking their mathematics and science learning. The school community also hold a shared belief in the importance of creativity and the arts. Children benefit greatly from creating and performing whole school performances, such as a recent historical mystery-themed play. Reflecting on this experience, children share how much these events help to develop their confidence and skills. This approach fosters an individual and collaborative feeling of pride and success.

- Outdoor learning is an important strength in the school's work. Partnerships are used effectively to support the delivery of high-quality experiences. Teachers make skilful use of the school grounds and natural areas as contexts for learning. This enhances their teaching of discrete curriculum subjects, such as health and wellbeing, and positively impacts on children's engagement. Children are deeply knowledgeable about local wildlife, gardening, environmental issues and learning for sustainability. They demonstrate a well-developed understanding and vocabulary about the natural world around them. Working closely with partners, staff support older children to earn and achieve accredited awards linked to outdoor learning. As planned, teachers should continue to develop approaches to plan and assess children's outdoor learning and skills progressively over time.
- In most lessons, teachers provide learning activities and tasks that offer appropriate levels of challenge. They provide clear explanations and instructions to support learning. Lessons often include an exciting opening event to inspire and stimulate children's thinking. Teachers review classroom environments to ensure they are inclusive and encourage independence. They plan and provide targeted interventions for children who require additional support with literacy and numeracy. Support staff assist children well during lessons and are sensitive to their needs and wellbeing. Children benefit from their encouragement and support. Teachers should continue to explore the most effective accommodations and learning approaches to support the needs of all children.
- Teachers share effectively the purpose of learning and ways in which children can be successful. Most children are now ready to identify and co-create measures for success more often. Teachers use questioning well to check for understanding and to promote curiosity and wonder. Most teachers include challenging and open-ended questions which support children to develop further their higher order thinking skills.
- Teachers use digital tools and resources very well to consolidate and enhance children's learning. For example, teachers include multimedia clips in lessons to support language learning or to explain scientific concepts. Children use digital technologies and software independently with confidence. They benefit from using online games and applications to practise their literacy skills. Older children learn to code using paired software and hardware. They demonstrate growing analytical skills and creative thinking. Younger children explore solving problems using programming digital toys.
- Teachers and support staff are embedding 'playful learning' approaches for younger children. They plan and provide a well-considered balance of direct teaching, adult-directed activities and child-led play opportunities. Staff regularly evaluate the quality of the learning spaces and resources. They seek feedback and opinions from children which they use to help review what is on offer. Staff use commentary effectively during play to challenge children and promote deeper learning. Children are growing in independence, demonstrate imagination and creativity and engage in play for sustained periods. They are creating more complex structures with blocks and often build on ideas and skills from class lessons during their play. Staff should continue to explore and use national guidance and professional learning to inform play-based learning approaches.
- Staff offer children verbal feedback, encouragement and praise during lessons. Teachers increasingly provide detailed written feedback on children's writing. This helpful approach could now be extended. Children find regular opportunities to self- and peer-assess their work helpful. Senior leaders and teachers have developed a robust assessment strategy and calendar. They use this well to ensure a range of summative and diagnostic assessments across the session. Staff consider the information gained from these assessments along with their evaluations of taught lessons when planning class learning. Senior leaders and staff

should now consider ways to assess children's application of skills and knowledge within different contexts.

- Children create targets, often linked to a class or school context for learning, and work towards these through homework with their families. They reflect on and make notes about their progress. Teachers should continue to support children to set and evaluate individual targets for key areas of literacy and numeracy. It would be helpful for these to be closely linked to feedback on their work and referred to regularly. This should support children to understand more fully their strengths and next steps in learning.
- Recently, teachers engaged in moderation activities with colleagues from other schools to discuss and explore national expectations and standards in writing. This is supporting robust professional judgement of children's achievement of a level within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Senior leaders and staff should continue to moderate together to develop further their shared understanding of children's progression through CfE levels.
- Teachers involve children in planning processes regularly and they identify what and how they would like to learn. Staff work closely together to plan effectively over different timescales and are responsive to children's needs and interests. They use CfE experiences and outcomes and local authority progression frameworks well to plan children's learning across the curriculum. Teachers refer to national Benchmarks when planning how they will assess children's knowledge.
- The headteacher meets teachers termly to track and discuss children's progress in wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. This helps to monitor the support or challenge children receive. Staff should explore ways to more closely track and plan incremental steps of progress for children who face barriers in aspects of their learning. This should help children understand the positive progress they are making over time.

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

- At the time of the inspection, the school roll comprised of a small number of children in P1-P7. As a result, attainment and progress will be expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels.
- Overall, children's progress and attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good. Children achieve appropriate CfE levels at key milestones and, across the school, a few children are exceeding nationally expected levels.

Attainment in literacy and English

Listening and talking

- Children speak confidently and articulately with each other and adults. They use a clear voice and add expression when performing plays and poetry. Children ask thoughtful questions to explore and clarify their thinking. Younger children enjoy expressing their thoughts and ideas. Older children take useful notes during explanations and to gather information. They are becoming more skilled building on the answers of peers during discussions. Across the school, a few children require further practice in listening respectfully to others and turn-taking.

Reading

- Younger children blend sounds to create and read simple words. They enjoy listening to, discussing and retelling stories and rhymes. Older children read aloud with growing fluency and use appropriate pace and tone. They offer and justify preferences for particular authors and genres. A few children will benefit from revisiting parts of speech, such as nouns, adjectives and verbs. Older children should further explore figurative language.

Writing

- Across the school, children write well for a variety of purposes. Younger children include imaginative ideas in their stories and drawings. They are becoming more confident mapping out their story plan. They are beginning to include a simple problem in their texts to add interest. Older children write successfully to persuade their reader and include key information in factual reports. They identify elements which writers use in particular genres to engage the reader. Children should continue to practise applying these within their own texts.

Numeracy and mathematics

Number, money and measure

- Younger children count forwards and backwards with growing confidence and demonstrate one-to-one correspondence. They identify the missing number in a simple sequence accurately. They use non-standard and standard units of measurement to compare lengths in lessons, during their play and when outdoors. Children should continue to build their understanding of division. As children progress, they become more confident using an increasing range of strategies when adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. They share their thinking processes. They will benefit from further help to extend their mathematical vocabulary. Older children apply their knowledge and understanding of money well in meaningful tasks, such as when calculating fundraising totals. They require more practice identifying the calculations needed to solve multi-step problems. This should help to build their confidence to recognise and select the most efficient strategies.

Shape, position and movement

- Children name and discuss features of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects appropriate to their stage of learning. Younger children use vocabulary of position and movement in their play indoors and outside. Older children create and explore nets to deepen their understanding of the properties of three-dimensional objects. Children will benefit from exploring their understanding of compass points, angles and bearings through lessons and real-life application.

Information handling

- Children gather and organise data and display this in pictograms, graphs and charts appropriate to their age and stage. Older children find digital technologies and software helpful to organise and present information they have gathered, such as creating pie charts. Across the school, children answer questions about information displayed in different forms. They are ready to create and ask their own questions more regularly. Older children enjoy exploring probability and chance through a range of games and activities.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders collate overall attainment figures for literacy and numeracy each year. They share these with staff and discuss any changes in attainment over time. Current and historical data shows sustained high levels of attainment at the end of CfE early level. It also shows that overall children perform well in standardised assessments at key milestone stages. Senior leaders and staff analyse attainment data to understand and identify overall strengths and gaps in learning. In recent years, they identified and targeted children's progress and attainment in writing and talking and listening. This work has had positive impact and children show increased skills in these areas. Senior leaders and teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of each individual child's attainment as they move through the school. They should now review and plan ways to accelerate progress and raise attainment for specific groups of children, such as those facing barriers in their learning.
- Senior leaders implement thorough procedures for monitoring and supporting attendance in line with local authority guidance. They inform all parents about absence reporting procedures. Staff highlight the importance of school attendance in supporting children's achievement and wellbeing. Last session in April, overall attendance was 94.9% and this session it is 95.9%. This shows an increase and school attendance remains above the national average. Where there are concerns about attendance or late coming, senior leaders have well-established approaches to support children and families. For example, partners support children's wellbeing through targeted sessions. This helps to increase school attendance. There are

currently no children on part-time timetables and there have been no exclusions in recent years.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children demonstrate their strong skills in collaboration and communication through pupil committees and school-wide events. Older children show compassionate leadership capabilities within their 'play-leader' and prefect roles. In recent years, working together, the school community has achieved national awards for rights-based learning and learning for sustainability. Children are proud to talk about their achievements at assembly and share these through displays and photographs. They are particularly proud to ring the school bell when they achieve a target. With support, they are beginning to identify links between achievements and the school's 'meta-skills' programme. Teachers should continue to help children make these connections and to identify their transferable skills.
- Senior leaders track children's achievements, success and participation in activities both in and out of school. Staff use this information well to identify and address any gaps in children's experiences. This ensures that all children have varied and regular opportunities to experience success and build confidence.

Equity for all learners

- This session, and for several years, the headteacher and staff have used Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide additional support for literacy and emotional wellbeing for children who are face particular barriers in their learning. Staff have not yet collated or analysed robust, specific evidence about the effectiveness of PEF spending on children's progress and attainment. Senior leaders should now develop clear measures to evaluate the impact of this work on outcomes for children. This information should be useful in helping staff to understand and select the most effective support and interventions.
- Senior leaders and staff have a deep knowledge of each individual child and the local context of the school. They work closely with the Parent Council to support families with the cost of the school day. Being a rural area, they often use funds raised to cover transport costs. This helps children to attend excursions, competitions or experiences such as a theatre visit. Staff ensure all children have the equipment they need for classroom and outdoor learning, including school uniform. They support families facing challenges to connect with financial or wellbeing supports available in the local community or through partnerships. Children also provide families and a local foodbank with fruit and vegetables grown and harvested in the school garden. As a result, children and families feel well-supported and included in all aspects of school life.

Other relevant evidence

- Children receive their full entitlement to two hours high-quality physical education each week. Teachers make effective use of indoor and outdoor spaces to deliver a progressive programme of physical education. There are regular opportunities for children to participate in competitive sports and a wide range of physical activities.
- Across the school, children benefit from a clear, progressive skills programme in French. In both classes, children respond with growing confidence to instructions and questions using French language as part of daily interactions. Teachers have taught lessons alongside secondary specialist staff to support and extend children's learning. Children are also developing their use and understanding of Doric and British Sign Language as part of the school's language programme.
- The headteacher provides information for parents and the Parent Council on school improvement planning and progress. This includes a general outline of PEF spending. Staff should continue to explore ways to consult with children and families who are involved in projects on how PEF could be used to support progress.
- Senior leaders consider the school's small roll and organise regular learning and play experiences with peers from other local schools. This helps children to make connections, build new friendships and, for older children, supports transition to secondary school. Staff provide well-designed approaches and events to support children and their families as they join the school. This includes a range of social and academic activities before children begin attending. Senior leaders put enhanced individualised programmes in place when children require additional support through times of change. As a result, children and families feel well-supported and included during transition periods.

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.