

Summarised inspection findings

Pennyburn Primary School

North Ayrshire Council

16 September 2025

Key contextual information

Pennyburn Primary School is a non-denominational primary school serving communities in the Pennyburn area of Kilwinning. At the time of inspection there were 172 children on the roll organised across eight classes. The school is part of Kilwinning Academy school cluster. Around 89% of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 and 2, with approximately 55% of children in receipt of free meals. Currently, 71% of children are recorded as having an additional support need.

The headteacher has been in post for around four years. She is supported by one deputy headteacher and one principal teacher.

Pennyburn Primary School nursery class was inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the past 18 months, therefore, the local authority and headteacher had the option to include the nursery class as part of this inspection. We have agreed with the local authority and school that the nursery class is not part of this inspection. The findings set out below are for the primary school stages.

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

- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and wider staff team, has effectively created a welcoming, positive, and inclusive atmosphere across the school. The co-creation of class charters, linked to children's rights are displayed in all classes. These charters are implemented consistently across the school, in classes and through assemblies. Staff's regular reference to these is enhancing children's understanding of their rights.
- Children are proud of their school and demonstrate the recently reviewed school values of kindness, integrity, and ambition in their interactions with each other. All staff have high expectations of children and use nurturing approaches very effectively to create learning environments that are built on strong, supportive relationships. As a result, relationships between adults and children, and among children themselves are positive. Most children feel safe, listened to and are confident to express themselves. They are motivated to learn and benefit from the school's warm and caring atmosphere, which supports their growth and development well.
- The inclusive environment is a key strength of the school's overall provision. Staff have worked well together to strengthen relationships and improve behaviour across the school. Staff use positive praise effectively, and most children engage well in their learning. Teachers respond appropriately to low-level disengagement, supporting children to re-engage through access to additional resources or spaces, either independently or with sensitive adult guidance. They have introduced strategies such as soft lighting and calm, accessible areas to help children to regulate their emotions. A well-implemented mental wellbeing programme

supports both co-regulation and self-regulation activities. Junior Jannies is a leadership opportunity to help children develop skills for life, learning and work. Staff use it very effectively as a co-regulation strategy for a few children who can experience dysregulation within school. These approaches are having a positive impact on children's motivation to learn. Children are enthusiastic about their learning and levels of engagement have increased. Behaviour has also improved, with a notable reduction in serious incidents.

- Children show an increasing awareness of the emotional challenges their peers may face. They recognise the strategies used across the school to support wellbeing and promote positive behaviour. They feel these strategies are helping them build resilience and cope better in school.
- Most learning experiences are appropriately engaging and well-matched to the children's needs and interests. Most teachers give clear explanations and instructions, using a variety of teaching approaches very effectively to keep children engaged. Children are developing strong cooperative skills when working in pairs and groups. Children would benefit from more opportunities to take the lead in their learning, to further understand themselves as a learner.
- All teachers share the purpose of learning at the start of lessons. Most teachers clearly outline the steps children need to take to help them be successful which supports them in approaching their learning with greater clarity. To strengthen this further, teachers should involve pupils more actively in co-constructing steps for success. This should enhance the focus on the development of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) skills and help children better understand their progress in learning.
- In most lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to involve children in the lesson and check understanding. In a few classes, teachers are beginning to support children to develop higher order thinking skills. Across the school, there is a need to broaden questioning strategies to support children to extend their thinking skills.
- At early level, staff have effectively developed their use of spaces within the classroom and open areas to support play-based learning approaches. All children now enjoy learning in a very positive, creative, and nurturing play-based environment. Almost all children at this level are motivated and engage well in a blend of adult-led, adult-initiated, and child-initiated learning experiences. Staff support children appropriately to make choices in learning through play-based activities. These approaches help children to be increasingly curious and creative in their learning. Children access a helpful range of resources and experiences appropriate for their stage of development. Teachers incorporate the use of focused observations during play very well. They use these observations to inform assessments and plan appropriate next steps for learning. This has led to the effective development of provocations and play areas based on the children's needs and interests.
- Most teachers use digital technology well to enhance learning. For example, they create presentations to share information or to practise numeracy and mathematics skills. As a result, most children are developing effective digital literacy skills. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to develop children's digital skills to enrich learning across the curriculum.
- Most teachers provide timely verbal feedback that effectively supports children's learning. Staff should continue to refine their approaches to written feedback to ensure it clearly helps children identify their progress towards next steps. Senior leaders should support this by developing consistent expectations for the use of written feedback, ensuring it promotes learning, pace, and appropriate challenge across the school.

- Teachers have recently introduced learning targets to help children understand their next steps in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing. Moving forward, staff should ensure these targets are clearly linked to specific skills development. This will support children in identifying what they need to improve, while also deepening their understanding of themselves as learners.
- The headteacher has introduced a clear whole-school assessment framework that outlines when key assessments should take place across the school year. Most staff make effective use of a range of assessment approaches to inform their professional judgements about children's progress and achievement of CfE levels. These include summative, diagnostic, and formative assessments. Senior leaders should continue to support staff to include assessment more meaningfully in planning. This will help make sure assessment is a key part of learning and teaching and supports tracking and monitoring of progress. To strengthen consistency and accuracy in assessing progress, staff should have more opportunities to use national Benchmarks when making professional judgements.
- Teachers make effective use of curriculum progression frameworks to guide their short- medium- and long-term planning. Staff also plan well to meet the needs of children with additional support needs. Their approaches to tracking and monitoring help ensure support is targeted and effective. This helps ensure that children build on what they already know and make steady progress through the CfE levels. Teacher's planning is well-structured and consistent, supporting continuity in learning. Children are beginning to influence their learning through approaches such as 'what I know' and 'what I want to learn'. Staff should continue to develop this further, to ensure children have more meaningful opportunities to shape their learning in ways that reflects their interest and supports engagement.
- The headteacher makes very effective use of data to evaluate the impact of interventions on learners' progress. Senior leaders meet regularly with staff to review monitoring and tracking information, using this to identify next steps and ensure all children make the best possible progress.
- Teachers' engagement in moderation at whole-school and cluster levels is effectively developing a shared understanding of national standards and expectations.

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

very 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

- Most children in the school have identified additional support needs. Staff implement a wide range of highly effective, well-targeted strategies and interventions to close gaps in learning. These approaches are having a clear and positive impact on children's attainment. As a result, most children are making very good progress from their prior levels of learning. The majority are achieving their individual targets, with a few exceeding them. Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is improving, with evidence of sustained upward trends across the school.
- Across the school, most children are achieving national expectations in listening and talking. A majority of children are achieving national expectations in reading, writing and numeracy. A few children across the school are consistently exceeding expected levels of attainment in both literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children are making very good progress in their learning in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Most children at early level listen, respond appropriately and share their ideas well, particularly in play. At first level, most children engage well with each other, listen to instructions and answer questions appropriately. A few children need to listen more carefully to the opinions of others. Almost all children at second level listen respectfully, speak confidently, and explain reasons for their responses. Across the school, a few children require support to listen to the ideas of others and take turns appropriately.

Reading

- At early level, most children enjoy reading and listening to a range of texts. They hear and say sounds made by a combination of letters. They should continue to share their thoughts and feelings about stories and other texts. At first level, most children discuss their favourite authors and make predictions using contextual clues. They identify the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. They should continue to practise answering inferential questions about texts. At second level, most children are developing well skills in scanning texts to find key information. They discuss confidently different techniques used by the author to engage the reader. They should continue to develop their experience of answering evaluative questions about texts.

Writing

- At early level, most children form letters accurately and are developing greater confidence using their knowledge of sounds to write simple words. Children need to develop independent writing skills and apply simple punctuation more accurately. At first level, most children's writing

includes the features of narrative and persuasive texts. They link writing to real-life purposes. A few children need to organise writing in a logical order appropriate to the audience. A majority of children at second level use increasingly complex punctuation and create extended pieces of text for a range of purposes. They should continue to develop the use of emotive and figurative language in their writing to engage, persuade or influence the reader.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making very good progress in their learning in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children count forwards and backwards within 20. They are building their mental agility and knowledge of number facts and add and subtract within 10. Most children at first level round whole numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They use the correct notation for common fractions. Most children at first level also demonstrate skill in using money within £10 and have an awareness of how goods can be paid for using cards and digital technology. Almost all children at second level add and subtract multiples of 10, 100, 1000 and beyond accurately. They read and record time in both 12-hour and 24-hour notation and convert between both. They calculate profit and loss accurately when working within a budget.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children confidently sort and describe simple two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. At first level, almost all children can name, identify, and classify a range of 2D shapes and 3D objects using appropriate mathematical language. They would benefit from further practice exploring common angles such as right, acute, and obtuse angles. At second level, almost all children can accurately describe 3D objects and 2D shapes using specific vocabulary. Most children can confidently use mathematical language to describe and classify a wide range of angles within the environment.

Information handling

- Almost all children at early level confidently sort items in a variety of different ways according to colour, shape, and size. Most use tally marks to collect information and display this information using simple bar graphs or pictographs. At first level most children gather and display data using tally marks, block graphs, and Venn diagrams. They confidently interpret data from simple graphs and charts. Most children working at second level interpret and display information in a variety of different ways including pie charts, bar graphs and Venn diagrams. They talk confidently about how they can apply their knowledge and skill in information handling in real-life situations

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders have clear evidence that the school has raised attainment for most learners over time. The headteacher has embedded robust systems and processes to monitor and track attainment in literacy and numeracy over time. Senior leaders discuss with staff the progress and attainment of individuals and cohorts of learners regularly. The headteacher should now continue with plans to develop further the current systems and processes to track children's progress across all areas of the curriculum.
- Senior leaders along with the Raising Attainment teacher have developed a comprehensive raising attainment strategy which is understood very well by staff. Teachers plan a range of effective targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy to support children in class and in the learning zone. Staff review the effectiveness of interventions regularly. They use this robust data to inform targeted and highly impactful interventions for individual children or groups not

making expected progress from prior levels. As a result, children make very good progress from prior levels of learning.

- Senior leaders and Area Inclusion Worker monitor overall attendance rigorously. They follow the local authority policy and use the Area Inclusion Support Worker to help improve individual children's attendance. Senior leaders report that the most effective strategy to improve children's attendance has been to develop positive and trusting relationships with families. While overall attendance continues to improve, it is below the national average. A few children have an absence of 10% or more. The headteacher has introduced a range of targeted approaches including the provision of specialist settings to help learners transition back to school and well-considered initiatives to improve children's confidence. Learners supported through this intervention have significantly improved their attendance.
- Where appropriate, and through consultation with parents, a few children attend school on a part-time basis. Senior leaders and relevant staff review these arrangements with parents and partners regularly to ensure they meet the needs of children effectively and are for as short a time as possible.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children's achievements are valued and recognised by staff across the school. Staff celebrate these well through assemblies, digital platforms, certificates, and central displays such as the 'Achievements Wall'. Children have worked together to achieve a range of local and national awards and accreditations. These include eco schools, sport awards and children's rights. Children are proud of their achievements and success.
- Children participate in a range of leadership and pupil groups. For example, house captains and Junior Road Safety Officers play an active role in leading and promoting whole school initiatives. Children thrive as successful and confident individuals, contributing to the life of the school as a result of their participation in these groups and roles. They develop valuable leadership and communication skills as a result of the roles and responsibilities they experience.
- Children participate in a number of after-school and lunchtime clubs, such as choir, netball, football, and coding. Staff track children's participation in these clubs and opportunities. Senior leaders have a sound understanding of individual circumstances and take steps to support children at risk of missing opportunities. As a next step, staff should support children to identify, share, and track the skills they are developing through participation in these activities.

Equity for all learners

- All staff are acutely aware of the socio-economic circumstances of their children and families. They have a very strong understanding of the barriers to participation and learning. There is a strong focus on inclusion to meet the needs of individual learners. Senior leaders, teachers and Area Inclusion Worker monitor closely the progress of individuals and groups of children. This includes children who require additional support, have English as an additional language, are young carers or face poverty-related barriers to their learning and wellbeing. Carefully planned and monitored approaches ensure most children make strong progress against their individual targets.
- Staff have taken positive and effective action to address the cost of the school day. They ensure family circumstances are not a barrier to any children's participation in opportunities for learning or achievement. Families benefit from a range of sensitive and discreet approaches offered to them. The school subsidises trips, provides uniform and seasonal clothing, and a free healthy tuck shop is provided for pupils. The school has a well-established connection with

a partner which supports families to access a well-stocked pantry whenever required. As a result, all children can participate and are included fully in all aspects of school life.

- The headteacher has a clear and strategic plan for the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). She has allocated PEF creatively to provide a range of universal and targeted interventions to support improved outcomes for children across the school. This includes additional staffing and resources to support interventions to improve children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. In addition, staff use funds to support all children to take part in cultural experiences beyond the local environment. This is helping children to engage successfully in aspects of learning such as imaginative writing. Staff gather reliable data about these interventions. This is a strength of the school. This data demonstrates very well that the chosen approaches are supporting children to close gaps and accelerate progress in learning.

Other relevant evidence

- The headteacher consults with staff and parents appropriately on how to use PEF. Staff gather the views of parents at termly learning cafes and at Parent Council meetings.
- Children experience two hours of quality physical education each week.
- Teachers plan effectively to ensure children experience progression in learning French from P1 to P7. Children have opportunities to explore Scots language across the year through planned experiences appropriately linked to local events, Scottish culture, and celebrations.
- All classes currently use the school grounds to apply learning in new and creative ways. Regular active play from P1-7 is a key feature of this experience. All children report that learning outdoors motivates them to learn new skills and supports their wellbeing.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Approaches to raising children's attainment

Senior leaders identified the need to develop a strategic approach to help raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. Working with the Raising Attainment teacher they have developed an effective raising attainment strategy.

All staff use a range of effective approaches to raise attainment very well. They use a wide range of assessment tools successfully to gather important information relating to children's progress. Senior leaders and school staff use this information very effectively to identify areas that can be addressed at whole school, group, or individual level. Staff work together very well to support identified children, including those who are care experienced or have English as an additional language, to make strong progress towards individual targets. Children from across the school are supported through the 'learning zone' where a range of effective interventions support children to make progress in aspects of literacy and numeracy. These very effective approaches to wellbeing and inclusion have brought about key improvements in supporting children with anxiety and children's readiness, participation, and engagement with learning. Staff track children's progress very carefully to identify progress and next steps in learning. As a result, children's progress is being accelerated and gaps in learning are being narrowed or closed.

Teachers review each child's progress closely and examine results to identify progress and areas for development.

Senior leaders meet with teachers termly to discuss tracking and monitoring data on children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This includes information on children's attendance and participation in school clubs, as well as parental engagement in learning.

Senior leaders have deployed staff to ensure all children who require support are included in a range of interventions.

Staff use pre-and post-assessment information to evidence the impact of interventions on raising individual children's attainment.

Junior Jannies

Junior Jannies is a leadership opportunity to help children develop skills for life, learning, and work. Importantly, it is also used as a co-regulation strategy for a few children who can experience dysregulation within school.

This effective strategy allows children to develop skills to care for the school grounds, develop DIY skills, and show their skills in taking responsibility. This is supported by the school janitor, who acts as a strong positive role-model for the children who undertake this leadership role. All children involved in this leadership role feel that they know how to look after the school building, grounds, have developed skills for life learning and work, including how to 'fix' things and demonstrate a pride in having an opportunity to be responsible in this area.

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.