

Summarised inspection findings

Mill O'Forest Primary School

Aberdeenshire Council

23 September 2025

Key contextual information

Mill O’Forest Primary School is a non-denominational school situated in Stonehaven. The school has enhanced provision that supports children with a range of language and communication needs.

At the time of inspection, the school roll is 248 children across 10 classes and the enhanced provision.

The acting headteacher has been in post since October 2024. She is supported by an acting depute headteacher and acting principal teacher.

There has been a significant number of staffing challenges at all levels in recent years. This has had a direct impact on children’s learning experiences and attainment and achievement outcomes.

Senior leaders reported that no children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two. Most children live in SIMD deciles seven to ten. The percentage of children who require additional support with their learning is 29%. The percentage of children receiving free meal entitlement is 15%. Attendance as of May 2025 was 94%. This is in line with the national average.

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	

- The majority of children have positive relationship with their peers and teachers. Children learn about their rights in all classes and through class charters. Teachers use the values of honesty, equity, a caring attitude, respect and to try our best (HEART) in their approach to improving behaviour. Teachers refer to these refreshed values which are visible around the school when teaching. Children can describe the values and know how these apply to them.
- In a majority of lessons, children are motivated in their learning and interact well with each other. In a minority of lessons, children understand the purpose of their learning and how they can be successful. Teachers and senior leaders should work collaboratively to review their practice to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Senior leaders should regularly monitor the quality of learning, teaching and assessment to understand where there are areas of strength and where improvement is required. They should support teachers to share the most effective practice across the school, to reduce variability and improve the consistency and quality of children’s learning experiences.
- Children, staff and parents highlight concerns about the impact of dysregulated behaviour, bullying and safety. Staff’s work on promoting positive behaviour is beginning to have an early impact on improving children’s positive behaviour and reducing dysregulated behaviour. As a

result, in a majority of lessons, children's behaviour impacts positively on their learning. However, staff need to act promptly to review approaches to anti-bullying and improving children's feeling of safety across the school. They should use national guidance on anti-bullying and a renewed focus on respectful behaviours and children's rights to underpin this work.

- Children enjoy their learning in a majority of lessons, however there are important weaknesses across the school in learning and teaching approaches. Teachers need to ensure that time is maximised for children to learn productively. Currently, too much of children's learning time is lost on inefficient transitions and time taken to settle to learning. There is a lack of pace and challenge in too many lessons and teachers are overly reliant on textbooks and worksheets. This results in most children being passive in their learning and a minority being disengaged. Senior leaders and teachers need to ensure they match learning more appropriately to children's needs, to support and challenge children to do well. Teachers should improve the quality of children's experiences to promote children's creativity, independence, confidence and levels of engagement.
- Most classroom environments are attractive and contain supports for children's learning, however, children are not yet fully independent in using these. All staff should review the use of open spaces within the school. They need to agree the use of these spaces and to enhance the environment to support children's learning and as an additional resource for teaching. Children speak positively about previous outdoor learning experiences. Senior leaders should now support staff to agree a consistent and progressive approach to ensure all children receive high-quality outdoor learning experiences.
- Staff at the early level are developing play pedagogy in line with national guidance. This is having a positive impact on younger children, as they increasingly access developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Staff now need to build on this positive start, to increase children's independence in their play, widening their use of the environment. This will support a better balance of child-led, teacher-initiated and teacher-directed play to support children's independence in their learning. Senior leaders and staff need to engage in further training and consider more fully the principles of effective learning through play.
- Children demonstrate their confidence in a few positive examples of effective leadership roles. Children are beginning to take on increased responsibilities as leaders within their school. A few children contribute to the wider life of the school when acting as reading buddies and house captains. More widely, children do not yet have a consistent voice in shaping the life and work of their school. Senior leaders and teachers now need to focus on creating well-planned activities across the life of the school for children to take on leadership roles. As part of this work, children's views should be sought, taken into consideration and acted upon.
- In a majority of lessons, teachers provide clear explanations. A majority of children follow instructions well when taking part in learning activities. In a few examples, teachers extend children's learning in lessons and questioning is used effectively. Teachers need to develop the range and quality of questioning to include higher order thinking skills and challenge children's learning further. While a minority of teachers use a range of positive teaching approaches, overall, across the school, children do not yet have sufficient choice or responsibility for leading their own learning. Children need to be given more opportunities to become independent and more active participants in their learning.
- Children at all stages have access to digital technology to enhance their learning. This includes the use of interactive boards, pupil devices and programmable technology. Children at all

stages use assistive technology well to support them in their learning. All staff now need to become more creative in their use of technology.

- Across the school, teachers do not use feedback consistently well to support children to know their strengths and next steps in learning. Teachers need to review their approaches to feedback, including promoting children's self- and peer-assessment skills, to ensure this is progressive as children move through the school.
- Teachers use different methods to check on children's progress, including end of unit tests, phonic assessments and standardised assessments. However, staff do not consistently use this information well enough to identify what children need to do next. Teachers undertake assessments mostly in literacy and numeracy. They do not yet have consistent approaches to assess children's learning across all areas of the curriculum. Senior leaders and staff need to review approaches to assessment across the school to ensure consistency at all stages. Teachers should include assessment opportunities that allow children to apply their learning in unfamiliar contexts. In the early stages, teachers should use observations of children's learning through play to assess how well children are learning, and what they already know to plan for their next steps.
- The variable and inconsistent use of assessment across the school, along with limited moderation opportunities, means that teachers' professional judgements are not yet robust. Senior leaders and teachers need to improve moderation processes across the school. They now need to work together to develop a clear understanding of moderation and how should be used to improve standards of learning, teaching and assessment. This will lead to a shared understanding of national standards and support more reliable and valid judgements of children's attainment.
- Teachers use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes to plan children's learning over different timescales. This includes progressive planning based on local authority pathways for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Previous work on planning for learning in other curricular areas should now be built upon to ensure children's learning is progressive and relevant to their age and stage.
- Senior leaders and teachers do not yet track and monitor children's progress reliably. This is having a substantial negative impact on their learning. Senior leaders are aware of the need to re-introduce and improve processes for monitoring and tracking children's learning in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders and staff need to develop effective monitoring and tracking, for example through more regular attainment meetings. This has the potential to help the staff team to better identify gaps in children's learning. They need to be clearer about any interventions that are required to support and challenge all learners to make the progress they are capable of.
- In developing new processes for tracking and monitoring, teachers should consider how to track the progress of different groups of learners. This includes those facing additional challenges in learning, young carers and those living with financial hardship. This will help staff to understand the range of children's needs more effectively and improve the planning of interventions to better support learning and improve attainment and attendance.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

- Data relating to children's achievement of CfE is not yet reliable and valid. Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Most children are capable of making better progress. Therefore, their progress is weak. Senior leaders and teachers' approach to raising attainment requires significant improvement. Senior leaders need to develop a clear strategic plan for raising attainment. Current approaches have important weaknesses that are impacting on children's progress.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children's attainment is satisfactory for reading and listening and talking, and weak for writing. Children's performance in national standardised assessments indicates that the majority children are capable of more than their day to day literacy work demonstrates. Staff need to consider how to assess children's progress in listening and talking more accurately.

Listening and talking

- Most children across the school talk confidently to adults and one another. Most children listen well to instructions and other people. At early level, children listen to a story showing they understand how to be a good listener. Most children identify rhyming words in a text accurately. At first level, the majority of children take turns and make appropriate eye-contact with the speaker. They discuss features of a text well and listen for expression and emphasis. At second level, the majority of children give their opinions on a text confidently. They build on the ideas of others. At first and second levels, a significant minority of children do not listen to other children respectfully when they give answers or deliver a presentation to the class. They need further support to help them to develop turn taking skills.

Reading

- At early level, most children identify letter sounds accurately and most blend them into words. They identify the front and back cover of a book and predict what might happen next in a story. At first level, the majority of children discuss authors they prefer and which characters they like from their chosen texts. At second level, the majority of children identify and explain how the author uses features of language to engage the reader. At first and second levels, children would benefit from more opportunities to choose texts from the school and local library to expand their knowledge of authors.

Writing

- Children do not make sufficient progress in writing as they move through the school. At early level, most children write sounds and words, and a majority of them use these to form sentences. Teachers encourage children to form their letters correctly in the early stages of the school. As they progress, the quality of their work is not of a sufficiently high standard and most

children need more support to work on their presentation. Children at first and second levels require more regular planned opportunities to write at length and for a variety of purposes. They need more time to practice the skills of a genre before moving onto a different type of writing. Teachers and senior leaders need to consider their approach to teaching writing across the school. They should ensure children make better progress in their writing and to build on prior knowledge and skills.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children's attainment in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. However, children are making insufficient progress from prior levels of attainment, particularly those children who require more challenge in their learning.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children count backward and forwards with accuracy to 20, with a minority counting forwards beyond 20. They add and subtract confidently to 10, with a minority confident beyond 10. At first level, most children read, write and order numbers to 1000. They confidently round numbers to the nearest 10, but they are less confident rounding to the nearest 100. They are confident in adding and subtracting with three digits. Children need to increase their confidence in recognising simple and equivalent fractions. At second level, the majority of children round decimal fractions accurately to the nearest whole number to one decimal place. The majority of children use multiplication and division facts well in calculations. They identify multiples and factors of whole numbers and calculate percentages of quantity well. Children should now be challenged to apply these skills more in real life experiences.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, the majority of children name two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects accurately. At first level, the majority of children identify the properties of shape using appropriate mathematical language. At second level, the majority of children use the correct mathematical language to describe acute, obtuse, straight and reflex angles. They should continue to practice drawing angles accurately. Across the school, almost all children would benefit from more practical experience in applying their learning and knowledge about shape, position and movement.

Information handling

- At early level, children understand how to collect information using tally marks and interpret the information in a pictogram. For example, children gather and interpret information about pets. At first level, children use tally marks accurately and extract key information from charts, bar graphs and tables to answer questions. At second level, children know how to display data appropriately using pie charts and line graphs. They understand how to choose a suitable scale when creating a graph. Across the school, children need more experience in information handling including the use of technology.

Attainment over time

- Overall, the majority of children make insufficient progress in learning in both literacy and numeracy as they move through the school beyond P1 and P2. In addition, the majority children at the older stages have made insufficient progress during the course of the school year. Teachers' professional judgements of children's progress requires improvement. Senior leaders and staff need to work together to improve their understanding of national standards through improved approaches to moderation and assessment. Until recently, senior leaders and staff have not met regularly to review and discuss children's progress. As a result, senior leaders and staff do not have a clear understanding of children's progress, including for those who require additional support with their learning. Senior leaders need to work promptly with staff to develop clear, systemic approaches to raising attainment and improving

progress. The recent introduction of a whole school tracking system and the audit of children's needs has the potential to support staff in raising attainment.

- Staff monitor and track children's attendance in line with local authority expectations. A minority of children have attendance below 90%, with a few having very low levels of attendance. A few children are on part-time timetables. Staff should continue to monitor the use of this approach to ensure this aligns to national expectations. Staff need to take better action to improve levels of attendance and instances of late coming, including discouraging families from taking holidays during term time.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff provide insufficient opportunities in the classroom, beyond the classroom and through the totality of their curriculum for children to develop, achieve and understand important skills. Staff need to consider how they are developing children's skills, knowledge and attributes in line with the four capacities of CfE.
- Children enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities out with school and in the recently reinstated clubs in school such as netball, football and a Glee club. Staff celebrate children's achievements in assemblies, in class, on wall displays and through the headteacher's monthly newsletter. Children are proud of the certificates and house points they receive in recognition of their achievements. Senior leaders should, as planned, consult with children and introduce more clubs and activities to better meet the needs of all children.
- Older children undertake leadership roles such as house captains and buddies, supporting children with the transition from nursery into P1. They are, however, not yet clear about which skills they are developing as a result of these roles and activities. Staff track children's participation in clubs and wider activities. They are at the early stages of identifying and supporting children who may be at risk of missing out.
- Staff now need to consider how they plan progressively to develop the CfE four capacities. They should also work with children to develop a shared understanding of the skills they develop through their activities and how these can support them in other aspects of their learning.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff understand the social and economic context of the school community. They carefully consider the cost of activities and trips and source funding to reduce the financial demands on families. This ensures that financial circumstances are not a barrier to children's participation in opportunities. This is also supported by well by the parent and teacher association who run an eco-friendly uniform swap service and fundraise to provide resources for each classroom.
- In recent years, Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) has been used to provide additional staffing to support identified groups of children. Senior leaders are unable to reliably demonstrate the impact of PEF on children's outcomes. Going forward, senior leaders should use a range of data to identify poverty-related gaps and other barriers to children's learning. They should consult with children and parents as to how best use future PEF funding.
- Senior leaders and staff need to improve their understanding of children's attainment across the school. They are unable to identify attainment gaps for children or how well different groups of children make progress, for example, children with additional support needs. Staff need to ensure they work with stakeholders to use PEF to accelerate the progress of children. They

need to ensure they use appropriate interventions to address any gaps in attainment they identify.

Other relevant evidence

- Children are receiving the national expectations of a minimum of two hours of learning in physical education.
- Most children are receiving their entitlement to religious education and observance in line with the religious education requirements.
- Staff need to improve their approach to 1+2 languages. A minority of children are receiving learning in one or more languages beyond English.
- As planned, senior leaders should ensure there are robust arrangements in place for the planning and use of PEF.
- The local authority needs to work promptly and closely with all staff to improve leadership across the school. There is a need to improve the overall strategic leadership of key priorities including learning, teaching and assessment and raising attainment and achievement, but also in areas of such as anti-bullying, safety and safeguarding. It will also be important to help all staff understand their roles in leading and supporting change across the school to improve experiences and outcomes for children.

Quality of provision of the Special Unit

Context

An enhanced provision is located within Mill O'Forest Primary School. It is a local authority special unit that supports children with a range of language and communication needs. Children are placed in the enhanced provision by Aberdeenshire Council's Complex Needs Forum.

The current roll of the enhanced provision is five children ranging from P2 to P7. Staff support most young people to attend mainstream classes and provide personalised, targeted support within the enhanced provision. The current teaching staff allocation is 1.2 full-time equivalent teachers. Pupil support assistants provide additional support for children in class and during break and lunchtime. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher assume operational leadership for the enhanced provision.

Learning, teaching and assessment

- Staff in the enhanced provision provide a calm, purposeful environment that supports most children well to engage in learning. Staff are building their knowledge effectively of individual approaches and strategies to suit the needs of children. As a result, most children develop learning routines which help them to better engage in planned activities. Children respond well to active tasks and enjoy being able to choose learning activities. For example, workstations involving a range of tasks help a few children to transition into the school day and prepare them for further learning. Teachers support most children well to understand the structure and purpose of learning. They use symbol-based communication to make sure that children can understand the sequence of activities and the next steps in their learning. This approach supports most children to remain focused and make progress in planned activities. For a minority of children, staff should consider the level of pace and challenge across the curriculum to improve children's levels of engagement.
- Senior leaders and teachers should now reflect on the breadth and structure of the curriculum to further increase children's engagement. Children would benefit from learning that is better matched to their interests. Staff should consider how active learning in the community could support children to further develop their confidence and independence. In addition, when appropriate, staff should create more opportunities for children to work together in small groups in the enhanced provision classrooms. This will enable children to develop important self-regulation and communication strategies.
- Staff's overall approach to quality assurance of learning and teaching in the enhanced provision is not yet developed sufficiently. Senior leaders need to develop further a planned programme of classroom observations. They should ensure that staff receive regular feedback and are supported to reflect on their own development priorities. Staff should consider how they can further build capacity and expertise by observing or learning from effective practice in other specialist establishments. Teachers could benefit from access to professional learning networks to enhance their understanding of highly effective practice.
- Staff are at an early stage of working together to moderate children's progress in learning in the enhanced provision. Senior leaders should work with teachers to formalise moderation arrangements. They should consider how to support teachers to moderate with colleagues within the school and through establishing links with colleagues in other similar settings. This could increase staff confidence and help teachers to provide reliable and robust information on the progress that children make.
- Teachers use Individual Education Plans (IEPs) well to profile and record factors giving rise to children's additional support needs. They involve parents regularly in reviewing their child's

progress. For a majority of children, these IEPs involve partner agencies, such as speech and language therapists and occupational health therapists. These plans detail long-term and short-term targets as well as strategies and success criteria. Staff evaluate IEPs termly and more regularly if required. For a few children, plans need to be clearer with targets which are progressive, achievable, specific and measurable.

- Senior leaders and staff need to review processes around tracking and monitoring. Staff do not yet have a strong understanding of the progress that children make over time. Senior leaders should take steps to establish more robust quality assurance procedures around planning, tracking and monitoring in the enhanced provision. This will help to ensure that children's targets build on what already know and will inform staff's subsequent planning more effectively. This could provide staff with a more fully developed understanding of children's expected progress and plan interventions more quickly when children required.

Raising attainment and achievement

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- All children in the enhanced provision have a highly individualised curriculum. As the current number of children is very small, direct comparison to national expectations of achievement of CfE levels is not appropriate. Overall, the majority of children make satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy in comparison to their prior levels of attainment.
- In literacy, most young people work at CfE levels appropriate to their needs. In listening and talking, children working at early level choose texts to listen to. They recount key details of a familiar story and name and identify key characters well. Children at first level, listen for instructions and use information gathered to support them to complete tasks. In reading, children at early level use pictures and logos well to support their understanding of their environment and sequences of learning tasks. At first level, children discuss the main ideas and characters in a text and use pictures well to support their understanding. In writing, children at early level explore sounds and understand that symbols and letters convey meaning. At first level, children are beginning to use word banks and visual resources to develop strategies to spell new and common words. Teachers should continue to reflect on how to further develop literacy across the curriculum.
- In numeracy, children at early level use a range of concrete materials to describe and sort objects. They split a whole object into halves and share out items into equal groupings well. They are developing an awareness that coins can be exchanged for items but are not yet able to recognise the value of coins or use them in real life contexts. Children at first level understand the role of the numerator and denominator in fractions. They use pictorial and concrete materials to demonstrate understanding of equivalent fractions, such as a half equalling two quarters. They are not yet able to tell the time on analogue or digital clocks using half past, quarter past and quarter to.

Attainment over time

- Over time, a majority of children make sufficient progress from their start point. Staff use progression frameworks and IEP targets to track children's progress. However, staff are not readily able to provide information on the progress that children make over time. Staff now need to take steps to provide a framework that enables them to identify more clearly patterns in children's attainment. Senior leaders need to develop a stronger focus on monitoring the progress of children in the Enhanced Provision.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- A few children in the enhanced provision benefit from extra-curricular activities such as participating in the school's musical drama production. These opportunities help children to develop their confidence, social and communication skills. However, staff's approaches to providing out of class activities and accredited awards are insufficient and not embedded across the Enhanced Provision. Staff should consider how the skills and attributes gained during out of class activities and community-based learning could support children to improve skills development and contribute towards IEP targets. Staff should improve strategies to monitor and track achievements, skills and work-based learning opportunities. They could also reflect on how this could lead to celebrating the strengths of children by taking part in accredited awards programmes.

Equity for all learners

- Children who attend the Enhanced Provision have an attendance rate of 94.45%. This is above the national average for the sector.

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.