

Summarised inspection findings

Holmston Primary school

South Ayrshire Council

31 March 2026

Key contextual information

Holmston Primary School is a non-denominational school located in Ayr. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 189 children taught across seven classes. A third of children live within Scottish Index Multiple Deprivation zones 1 and 2. Approximately half of the children on the school roll are recorded as requiring additional support with their learning. In P6 and P7, 15% of children are registered for free school meals. The headteacher has been in post since 2015. The headteacher is supported by a deputy headteacher and principal teacher.

1.3 Leadership of change	very good
This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are: ■ developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community ■ strategic planning for continuous improvement ■ implementing improvement and change	

- The headteacher and all staff create a warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos across the school where positive relationships are a strength. These positive relationships are underpinned by the school motto, 'Aim for the Highest' and all staff have high expectations of children. Staff interactions with children are nurturing and supportive and all staff know children and their families very well. All children and staff model clearly the school values of respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty and courage in their daily interactions with each other. These values are well-embedded and underpin the life and work of the school.
- The headteacher provides highly effective leadership and has a clear and ambitious vision for the school based on sound educational research. The deputy headteacher supports the headteacher very effectively. Together they manage the strategic direction and pace of change for the school very well. They are both well-respected by children, staff, parents and partners. Almost all parents feel comfortable approaching senior leaders and view the school as an important part of the local community.
- Senior leaders and staff agree school improvement priorities through well-established and effective self-evaluation processes. Senior leaders are skilled in analysing a wide range of data to ensure the most appropriate improvement priorities are identified. This session, staff are focusing on implementing creative and innovative approaches to learning and teaching across the curriculum, alongside raising attainment in numeracy. Children use enquiry-based approaches to learning. These approaches have been sustained over time and ensure that almost all children are highly motivated and engaged in their learning.
- The headteacher has created a supportive culture of leadership across the school and almost all teachers lead on key priorities linked to school improvement. Teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to engaging in professional learning to improve outcomes for children through the professional review and development process (PRD). For example, they lead

change and improvement for children through the planning and delivery of adaptive teaching approaches in reading and numeracy. Teachers worked collaboratively with other local schools to drive forward this improvement work. As a result, most children are developing well their conceptual awareness of numeracy skills. Most children are building their confidence in reading skills.

- Support staff take on leadership roles across the school. They take part in professional learning and use the skills and knowledge gained to support children very well. This includes planning and delivering reading interventions, developing the use of assistive technologies with children and leading nurture groups. Support staff work well with teachers to evaluate children's progress, adapting children's learning to ensure the most appropriate outcomes. Support staff also plan and lead a range of after school clubs for children which include Lego Mindstorm and a gardening club. This positive culture of leadership supports successfully children's access to the curriculum and enhances children's learning very well.
- All teachers work collaboratively very well and take seriously their role in supporting continuous improvement. Teachers work together effectively to plan peer learning visits to each other's classrooms. This allows them to model and share their practice, develop further their skills and identify next steps in learning and teaching. Teachers comment that they have strengthened their practice as a result of this work and there is a strong culture of peer reflection and supportive professional dialogue.
- The headteacher has well-established and effective processes in place for evaluating the work of the school. A well-planned collegiate calendar sets out regular evaluation activities. This includes learning observations, looking at children's work and talking to children through identified focus groups. Information gathered from these activities is used well by senior leaders to inform and evaluate school improvements through the improvement plan and standards and quality reporting.
- Children develop their leadership skills effectively through leading and participating in a number of groups. These include house captains, 'neurodivers' and Junior Road Safety Officers (JRSOs). Children value the opportunities they have to contribute to the life and work of the school. For example, children in the equalities group planned and delivered assemblies to their peers about the protected characteristics. This has raised awareness about diversity across the school. House captains work with children from across all stages, gathering their views on different areas of learning. This provides senior leaders with highly relevant information about what works well and what needs to improve. As a next step, senior leaders should now look for ways to involve all children in leadership opportunities to effect change across the school.
- The headteacher has developed an effective Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) plan. This details targeted approaches to improving outcomes for children who experience disadvantage. A number of staff use a range of interventions to support children and families. This work has improved transition processes in the early years and supports the raising of attainment in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher should now look at ways to involve the school community in deciding how PEF is allocated across the school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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

- Children engage enthusiastically with their learning in almost all lessons. They listen attentively and contribute articulately to class and group discussions. Children demonstrate independence during tasks and activities. Staff and children work collaboratively to co-create rights-based class charters. This ensures that children understand their rights and identify those rights that are most meaningful to them. Teachers are skilled in creating innovative classroom environments which highlight learning tools and evidence to reflect the learning in the classroom creatively.
- Senior leaders have developed a comprehensive learning and teaching policy that has a clear focus on high expectations for classroom practice. This policy underpins learning across the school. Teachers shared understanding of the policy ensures that there is a consistent, high-quality approach to learning and teaching across all stages. In all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning with children and provide clear explanations and instructions. In almost all lessons, children co-create confidently the outcomes of what they will learn. This helps to ensure children know how they are successful in their learning.
- Almost all teachers use questioning very effectively to check understanding and deepen learning. This includes asking children questions which require them to recall information, make links to their prior learning and to check for understanding. This supports children to develop well their higher order thinking skills and provides appropriate challenge for children in their learning.
- Teachers benefit from training on promoting children's thinking skills and creativity and this supports them to enrich the learning experiences for children. Children apply their higher order thinking skills in a variety of innovative contexts. This includes children working collaboratively on how to survive on a desert island or developing a sustainable theme park in a forest environment. These learning experiences support children's engagement and motivation in their learning.
- Almost all children are eager to learn. In all classes, children make choices about what they want to learn. Staff use observations and collaborate with children through a 'Think, Puzzle, Explore' approach to capture children's ideas and interests. This helps to ensure children have ownership of their learning and are involved in leading their learning. Children have regular opportunities to work independently, in pairs and groups.
- In almost all lessons, teachers plan a range of appropriate and creative learning experiences for children. These experiences are well matched to the needs of individuals and groups of

children. Children are skilled in using assistive technologies to help them access learning activities. Teachers support individual children in their learning subtly or model learning processes collectively. These approaches ensure children who face barriers to their learning are supported very effectively.

- Teachers give children high-quality verbal feedback that supports them to identify their next steps in learning in literacy and numeracy. Most children use self-assessment to identify what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. They are skilled in using peer assessment, providing well thought-out comments to support their peers. Teachers should now improve the quality of their written feedback to children. They should allow children time to consider any feedback given and make improvements to their work. They should look to extending the use of written feedback to children across curricular areas.
- Teachers provide effective digital learning experiences for children. They use digital tools creatively to enhance learning and teaching across the curriculum. Teachers use a variety of applications to provide visual prompts or quizzes to help children understand key teaching points. At P3, children use coding skills well to program digital robots. At P6, children developed a class policy about the safe and responsible use of artificial intelligence. Across the school, children demonstrate their digital skills very well and access a variety of tools and platforms confidently to support their learning.
- In P1 and P2, children learn through a well-considered approach to play which builds on children's nursery experiences very well. Teachers work collaboratively to plan a carefully considered environment which supports purposeful learning for all children. There is an appropriate balance of direct teaching, individual learning and play opportunities. As a result of this approach, children are making increased progress in their learning. As planned, staff should continue to build on and explore ways to extend this positive practice through the school.
- All teachers set termly targets for children in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and share these with children. This is working well and provides all children with opportunities to discuss their strengths and next steps in learning with their teacher. Children are beginning to use floorbooks and pupil profiles to record their successes in learning. As a next step, teachers should ensure that children have ownership of their own targets and involve children in the setting of their targets. This should provide further meaningful opportunities for children to be involved in leading their learning.
- Almost all teachers plan well for children's learning across a range of timescales. They use effectively progression frameworks linked to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. Senior leaders have introduced an effective assessment framework. This ensures all staff have clear expectations of how assessments should be planned, carried out and used to inform learning and teaching. Teachers use a range of formative, diagnostic and standardised assessments effectively to make judgements about children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Teachers also use this data to identify effectively any gaps in children's learning, planning appropriate interventions for groups and individual learners.
- Teachers value highly the planned opportunities for moderation activities both in school and with other local schools. Recently, their work has focused on moderation of standards in literacy. Teachers recognise the positive impact this has had on their teaching. Teachers also moderate their practice through peer lesson observations. As a result, teachers are more confident in their professional judgements of children's attainment and progress. Senior

leaders and teachers should now use this successful model of moderation in other curricular areas.

- Senior leaders and staff analyse a wide range of attainment data in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This provides them with a robust understanding of the progress of children in different cohorts. Senior leaders hold termly tracking, assessment and planning meetings with teachers and support staff. Together, they review the individual progress of each child and identify any gaps in children's learning. This includes information about attainment in relation to gender and any common barriers that children may experience.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use local authority progressive planning pathways to plan across all areas of the curriculum. These pathways take account of CfE experiences and outcomes. Children experience exciting learning which includes a clear focus on the progressive development of skills for learning, life and work. These include collaboration, critical thinking, character, communication, creativity and citizenship. This approach helps to ensure all children develop an understanding of how their learning links to everyday life.
- Teachers ensure children's learning across the curriculum links meaningfully and creatively to the local community. This includes through engaging outdoor learning opportunities for children which use local landmarks and outdoor spaces. Children also benefit from strong working relationships with cluster schools and partners. All children work with peers from a local school to learn sign language. Teachers develop international links with schools in Ukraine, India and Indonesia. These links support children to use their digital skills well to share project-based learning and activities. These activities also support children to demonstrate very well their skills in organisation and communication.
- Children and staff use a well-resourced and welcoming library to support reading across the school. Children also have the option to visit the local library over the year and have access to a small range of books within classrooms. Senior leaders now need to ensure that children know they have access to all books within the library. This should support further children's enjoyment of reading.
- Children from P1 to P7 learn French, with Spanish introduced from P5. These languages are taught in a progressive way and in line with the national '1+2' policy on modern languages learning. Teachers support children well to build on their language skills across the curriculum. All children experience two hours of high-quality physical education each week.
- Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for religious observance in line with national guidance. Children learn about world religions. They celebrate key events as part of the school diversity calendar. This is helping children improve their knowledge of the world, their own values and the values of others.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents are kept well informed about the progress their child is making, including through many family learning experiences planned across the year. This includes open events, learning showcase events, termly class newsletters and parents' evenings. Parents enjoy the opportunity to attend these events and attendance is high. Most parents agree that they receive regular and helpful feedback about how their child is learning.
- Parents are aware of school improvement priorities and have been involved in school learning events. This includes parents being part of a Reading Schools workshop and playing a part in a P1 'Mystery Readers' initiative. Recent parental workshops on having a growth mindset and the curriculum were positively received by parents. Parents highlighted the helpful strategies they could use with their child and having an increased knowledge around both areas.
- The active Parent Council are known as the 'Parent and Carer Voice' group. This group are very supportive of the school and organise a number of fundraising events across the year, including a Book Fayre. This helps to finance events throughout the year for children across the school.

2.1 Safeguarding

- 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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Senior leaders promote actively a culture where everyone understands their responsibility to support wellbeing. Children learn regularly about the importance of wellbeing through classroom experiences and school assemblies. This includes a monthly whole school focus on each area of wellbeing. All children complete a wellbeing web four times a year to help them reflect on their wellbeing. As a result, almost all children are developing very well an increased understanding of wellbeing.
- All staff demonstrate kindness and nurture in their interactions with children and know all children very well. Staff have taken part in professional learning on attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches. This supports staff very well to ensure a shared approach to treating all children as individuals. Senior leaders and staff consider carefully the school environment and have established calm spaces for children. This includes a well-resourced nurture room. Children access this space with supporting adults and are confident in using calming and mindfulness strategies to regulate their emotions. Children who require additional support access independently a range of resources such as ear defenders and visual timetables. These resources support them to engage in learning successfully within their classrooms. Almost all children behave very well in all areas of the school.
- Children talk with confidence about their rights and relate these to their experiences at home and in school. They identify the rights they feel are most relevant to them, supported by the use of creative and consistent classroom displays across the school. Children and staff worked collaboratively to ensure that children's rights are at the heart of the school's 'Building Positive Relationships' policy and anti-bullying policy. These policies set out the school's commitment to ensuring all staff and children learn and work in a safe and respectful climate.
- Across the school, children are friendly and welcoming. They treat each other with respect and kindness. Children know that if they have any concerns they can speak to a member of staff and they know staff will show sensitivity in their interactions with them. Most children believe the school deals with incidents of bullying well.
- In most classes, children participate in daily emotional check-ins through a range of strategies, including the use of 'worry boxes.' These strategies help children to be more aware of their own and others' emotions and how these change over time. As a next step, staff should ensure a consistent approach to the use of emotional check-ins across the school. This should help to ensure that all children know their emotions will be recognised and supported effectively.

- Staff ensure that children are active participants in discussions and decisions that involve them. They work collaboratively with partners, including parents and external agencies, to provide appropriate support for children. Staff support children well to reflect on their wellbeing and identify their individual targets. Staged intervention plans include appropriate learning targets and are reviewed regularly. As a next step, senior leaders should ensure that all children and parents are consistently involved in the setting of targets in Children's Plans.
- Most children feel that school helps them to learn how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They benefit from a progressive health and wellbeing curriculum which includes healthy eating, understanding emotions and keeping active. At P5 and P6, children take part in Bikeability sessions. Junior Road Safety Officers (JRSOs) encourage children to walk to school and promote the health benefits of active travel. Digital leaders developed online safety presentations and newsletters to support parent's understanding of online safety. These activities help to enhance further children's understanding of how to lead a healthy, safe and active lifestyle.
- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with education and the catering service.
- All staff understand and fulfil their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding, wellbeing, equality, and inclusion. All staff receive annual training in child protection, data protection, and cybersecurity. Staff skilfully implement their knowledge and understanding of how to keep children safe and cared for. Senior leaders use evaluations of annual training effectively to identify any gaps in knowledge and understanding amongst all staff. They provide additional training where required.
- Staff plan carefully children's transitions to ensure continuity and progression for all children, including those requiring enhanced transitions. At P6, children visit the local nursery to read stories with nursery children preparing to start primary school. These children then go on in P7 to support the new P1 children as their friend. Teaching staff and senior pupils from a local secondary school visit P6 and P7 to work with children on a range of activities linked to secondary school. These activities support children well to prepare for new routines and environments before moving into S1.
- Senior leaders follow local authority guidance when supporting young carers. They are proactive in working with children and families, signposting them to resources and supports available outside of school. This work ensures that children who are young carers do not miss out on opportunities due to their carer commitments. Staff professional learning around young carers has also strengthened the school's ability to support identified children. Senior leaders should now widen the awareness and understanding of what a young carer is across the school community to include all children.
- Children across the school are developing their understanding of equality and diversity well. Children learn to communicate in different ways through collaborative working with a local school. Children have a very good awareness of the protected characteristics through the work

of the equalities group. Staff have worked with children to identify engaging ways across the curriculum to learn more about discrimination and persecution. For example, they have explored these themes through carefully chosen projects relating to disability or race. These activities are increasing children's awareness of diversity and how to challenge injustice.

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

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress against their individual targets in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, at early and second levels, most children make good progress in literacy and English. At first level, almost all children make very good progress.

Listening and talking

- At early level, most children use body language well to show they are listening to others and make appropriate eye contact with their peers. At first level, most children listen and respond to others in respectful, appropriate ways. They now need further opportunities to use their listening skills to make relevant notes under different headings. At second level, most children build appropriately on the contribution of peers and show respect for the point of view of others. They identify the difference between fact and opinion with appropriate explanation. They would benefit from further opportunities to present ideas and information to a wide range of audiences.

Reading

- At early level, most children use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read simple words with confidence. They use picture clues well to make predictions and identify characters in stories. They are building their confidence in asking and answering questions about texts. At first level, most children answer literal, inferential and evaluative questions about texts well. A few children would benefit from more opportunities to read aloud familiar texts. At second level, most children understand and use reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and summarising to find key information. They should continue to increase their skills in identifying aspects of the writer's style, use of language and other features appropriate to different genre.

Writing

- At early level, almost all children are developing legible letter formation in writing. Most children are building their confidence in writing simple sentences using capital letters and full stops. They should continue to develop their independence in writing and be given opportunities to write in different ways. At first level, most children link sentences successfully using common conjunctions. They are developing their skills using a wider range of punctuation such as

commas, exclamation marks and speech marks. At second level, most children attempt to use language to influence or persuade in their writing, when evaluating or exploring issues. At first and second levels, children should be provided with more opportunities to create texts for a range of purposes and audiences.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Across the school, children demonstrate their skills well in a range of relevant contexts.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children count on and back confidently by adding on or taking away single digit numbers. A few children add two numbers beyond ten using concrete materials and count to numbers beyond 20. Most children link daily routines to simple time sequences and are beginning to identify time to o'clock. Most children at first level understand the place value of numbers to 1000. They explain the strategies they use to add and subtract two-digit numbers clearly. Most children at first level are less confident when working with units of measure for capacity. At second level, most children understand place value to 1, 000, 000 well. They calculate percentages of a quantity confidently. Almost all children tell the time using digital and analogue clocks. Children across the school would benefit from more opportunities to solve word problems.

Shape, position and movement

- Across the school, children recognise, sort and identify properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects at a level appropriate to their age and stage. At early level, most children name a few properties of two-dimensional shapes, such as curved or flat face. Most children at first level use appropriate mathematical vocabulary to describe the properties of three-dimensional objects, such as vertices and edges. They know that a right angle has 90 degrees. At second level, most children identify different triangles, such as isosceles, scalene and equilateral. They should now use their knowledge of angles to support their understanding of positional language and grid references.

Information handling

- At early level, most children organise objects to create simple patterns using colour and shape. Almost all children working within first level interpret information confidently to solve problems. For example, they use tally charts to collate information about their favourite pets and answer related questions. At second level, most children interpret pie charts well to answer questions about favourite items and calculate numerical probability.

Attainment over time

- Currently, the school's overall attendance average sits at 94 % which is above local authority and national averages. This has been consistent over the last few years. Senior leaders have implemented thorough procedures for monitoring attendance through the local authority strategy. They closely monitor children's attendance, collaborating sensitively with families to address any issues for specific children. Children's positive attendance is supported effectively by staff's nurturing approaches and engaging learning experiences. This motivates children to want to attend school.
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding and robust evidence of children's progress and attainment over time. Overall, most children make good progress from prior levels of attainment over time. Teachers use a range of assessment data well to inform their

judgements on children's progress and attainment. This helps to support teachers' professional judgements in literacy and numeracy around children's achievement of a CfE level. Senior leaders identified the need for further improvements in numeracy. Staff use concrete, pictorial and abstract strategies in all numeracy lessons. Children explain clearly their thinking around how they solve problems. This approach is having a positive impact on raising attainment in numeracy.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Across the school, children take part in a wide range of experiences and display important life skills. At P7, children attend a residential outdoor experience, taking part in activities such as abseiling, caving and paddleboarding. This supports children to demonstrate their resilience, independence and confidence. Children talk with pride about achieving the John Muir award through these experiences.
- In the upper school, a few children demonstrate well their organisation and communication skills through school-wide roles. These include house captains, JRSOs and members of equalities groups. In most classes, children display confidence through participation in school performances. Most children have opportunities to be successful learners and effective contributors through a range of after school and lunch time clubs. For example, they take part in football, netball, crocheting and dance. Staff record and monitor children's participation in school clubs and achievements out of school. If children are at risk of missing out, they are supported well by staff to participate in activities and clubs.
- Staff recognise and celebrate successfully children's achievements in and out of school. Children receive certificates linked to reading initiatives and are awarded house points for demonstrating the school values. These help children to foster a sense of responsibility and community. Children are proud to have their achievements celebrated in class and on wall displays, supporting their confidence and recognise the value in their achievements.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders have a clear and strategic rationale for the use of PEF. Additional school staffing has been provided to support a range of effective targeted interventions across the school for children. There is clear evidence that these targeted interventions are having a positive impact on children's learning and closing identified gaps in attainment.
- Senior leaders and staff have very good awareness of the socio-economic context of the school and know children and their families well. They use PEF and support from the Parent and Carers Voice group to ensure children do not miss out. This includes supporting children to attend the P7 residential visit, financing trips across the school and the annual school visit to a pantomime. The school also supports families by providing preloved uniforms, Halloween costumes and Christmas jumpers. Senior leaders further support families through their partnerships with a range of charities and sign posting to local supports and services.

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.