

Summarised inspection findings

Rathen School

Aberdeenshire Council

25 August 2026

Key contextual information

Rathen School is a rural, non-denominational primary school serving the hamlet of Rathen and the surrounding area of Memsie. Across the school, a few children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2. Around a quarter of children reside in SIMD deciles 5 and 6 with the remainder residing in SIMD decile 8. The current roll is 76 children arranged across four classes, three of which are composite classes. Senior leaders report that 32% of children require additional support with their learning.

The leadership team comprises of the newly appointed acting headteacher who took up post in May 2026 and a principal teacher. The school has had a number of changes in leadership over the last five years.

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	

- Across the school, staff create a positive, inclusive environment that supports learning and engagement. Children are respectful, engaged and interact positively with staff, peers and visitors. They understand and apply the shared values of TREES (teamwork, respect, encouragement, enjoyment and safety) in daily learning. Staff are developing children’s understanding of rights through the curriculum and wider experiences such as assemblies. Class charters and displays reinforce this learning. As a result, most children can name some rights, with older children beginning to understand their relevance to their lives.
- Staff consistently display positive, nurturing relationships that support children’s engagement in their learning well. Senior leaders and staff have reviewed classroom spaces and shared learning environments. This now ensures classrooms are inclusive and supportive taking better account of the needs and interests of the multi-composite ages and stages in each class. Staff are increasingly confident in meeting the needs of all learners which is supporting children to feel better understood as learners. Children show consistently positive behaviour, listen attentively, and interact with kindness. They contribute well to group and collaborative tasks. A few children require help to regulate their emotions. In these moments, adults intervene sensitively using effective, individualised approaches that enable children to re-engage in learning quickly. Children who require additional support feel well supported and demonstrate confidence in seeking help if they require it. As a result, children are responsible contributors when helping and working with each other, contributing to a cooperative learning environment across the school.

- Staff are beginning to introduce the language of skills to help children recognise and understand how they learn. They have worked well with children to co-construct six visual learning visuals, which support the development of key skills such as focus and resilience. These are clearly displayed and regularly referenced in lessons. As a result, most children talk confidently about these dispositions and increasingly explain how they apply them in their learning. This strengthens children's understanding of themselves as learners and promotes more positive attitudes to learning.
- In most lessons, teachers plan learning with associated tasks and activities set at an appropriate level of difficulty for most children. Teachers give clear instructions using helpful learning intentions and success criteria. As a result, most children understand their learning, engage purposefully, sustain focus and make appropriate progress. Teachers use questioning effectively to check understanding and increasingly use questioning to deepen children's thinking. As planned, senior leaders and teachers should continue to develop how they can involve children more consistently in co-creating success criteria. This should strengthen children understanding of what being successful looks. In a few classes, teachers need to increase the briskness of tasks to increase the engagement of a few children. A few children at early and first level are ready for more demanding tasks including providing them with greater opportunities to lead their learning. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to develop their approaches to learning and teaching across the school. This should ensure all learning reflects all children's needs and maximise their progress.
- At early level, staff support learning effectivity through play and use increasingly detailed observations to track playful skill progression. Teachers interact with children well, using questioning to promote independence and curiosity. As a result, almost all children are fully engaged in their playful learning experiences and show high levels of engagement and enjoyment. Across the school, teachers provide purposeful play experiences for all children. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to play across the school. They should offer a greater balance of open-ended, and child-initiated activities to develop children's creativity and curiosity further. Staff should continue to take forward professional learning to strengthen their understanding of high-quality play. This will support them to understand play as children progress from early to second level as they move through the school.
- Teachers use the outdoors to support children's learning well. Children talk positively and enthusiastically about growing food at their allotment and cooking their produce in their classroom. Children would benefit from more regular opportunities to learn outdoors within the school grounds and local area. Staff should continue to build on planning learning to allow children to use a wider range of context beyond the classroom to extend their skills in real-life settings.
- In most classes, staff use digital technologies effectively to support increased engagement in learning and support children's learning. Children use a range of digital tools to assist learning, including tablets for interactive tasks and laptops for research. In the upper stages, children access online resources and games to consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills. These tools help children engage more actively across the curriculum. As planned, staff should continue to develop approaches to g digital literacy skills progression across the school. Children who require additional support and who face barriers in literacy are increasingly using assistive technology and programmes to support their needs. This is developing well their confidence to

produce high-quality independent work. Teachers should continue to support children to make the most effective use of available assistive technology to support them in their learning.

- Senior leaders have developed a helpful assessment calendar that supports a more balanced approach across the school. Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessments effectively, particularly in literacy and numeracy, to gather evidence of progress and support professional judgements. In most classes, teachers use verbal feedback effectively, including timely praise and formative assessment. Teachers provide regular and helpful written feedback in writing. This is helping most children to talk confidently about their progress and identify next steps. Older children in the upper stages use tools increasingly well, such as Maths Mats, to assess their learning and set more specific targets, supporting greater independence. In a few classes, children self- and peer-assess their work. This further strengthens children's understanding of their successes in learning. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to develop approaches to feedback and assessment. This will help all children clearly understand what they do well and how to improve.
- All teachers plan learning appropriately over different time frames using Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. They use local authority progressive skills frameworks increasingly in literacy and numeracy. Teachers work together effectively in these areas to plan blocks of learning across CfE levels. This is helping improve the consistency of planned learning in these areas across stages. Teachers now need to use assessment information more clearly to inform their planning. This should help them to better meet the varied needs of all children in all classes.
- Teachers have undertaken useful moderation activities across the school including introducing a writing rubric. This is helping teachers to develop a shared understanding of writing standards and is supporting them to strengthen their professional judgements in writing across CfE levels. As identified, the headteacher should plan further opportunities for teachers to further moderate with colleagues from local schools. This should support staff's shared understanding of standards and increase teachers' confidence and accuracy of their professional judgements across the curriculum.
- Senior leaders meet regularly with support for learning staff to better understand the needs of children requiring additional support. Staff have improved planning and review targeted interventions. This helps staff evaluate how effectively they meet children's needs. Class teachers should be more involved, so they clearly understand intended outcomes and apply effective strategies within universal learning. This will strengthen support for these children and extend progress in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- At P1, most children achieve CfE early level in reading, writing and listening and talking. Almost all achieve CfE early level in numeracy. At P4, a majority of children achieve CfE first level in reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy. At P7, almost all children achieve CfE second level in reading, listening and talking and numeracy and, most children achieve CfE second level in writing. A few children at early and first level need to be provided with further challenge in their learning to develop their learning further, a few children at second level have accelerated their progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics beyond second level and are being provided with further challenge.
- Almost all children who require additional support for learning achieve their individual targets. A few of these children make strong progress and are now attaining in line with national standards and expectations.

Attainment in literacy and English

- In literacy and English, most children make good progress in listening, talking and writing at early level. The majority of children make good progress at first level. Almost all children make very good progress at second level.

Listening and talking

- At early level, children share ideas through play and in group or class. Most talk clearly to others. Most share their feelings ideas or thoughts. At first level, most children recognise the differences between fact and opinion. They contribute to group and class discussions, engaging well with others for a range of purposes. At second level, most children plan and deliver presentations with relevant content and appropriate structure. They participate in class discussions showing respect for the viewpoints of others and offer their own viewpoint. At all stages children need to develop further their speaking and presenting skills in class and across the school more regularly. This should support them to articulate and share their views and speak more confidently in a range of contexts.

Reading

- At early level, children use their knowledge of different sounds, and pictures in books, to understand texts. At first level, a minority of children discuss key features of fiction and non-fiction texts. Children at first level need to improve their understanding of what they are reading. At second level, almost all children use expression, punctuation and pace very

effectively to engage listeners. At first and second level, children need to develop their confidence in reading aloud in groups and for larger audiences.

Writing

- At early level, most children develop key writing skills and use simple punctuation well. At first level, new approaches to teaching writing are supporting most children to write at greater length and for a wider range of purposes. Children would benefit from greater opportunities to write independent to support them to move away from an overreliance on writing frames to structure their work. At second level, almost all children write confidently for a variety of purposes and write at extended length developing well story lines and characters. They use vocabulary very well to keep their writing interesting. Across the school, a few children across the stages need to continue to develop their spelling and handwriting. At early and first levels children should be given increasing independence and choice in writing to help them apply their skills more effectively and see themselves as authors. In the upper stages, a few children use assistive digital tools to support writing and reading well. Teachers should support these children to extending their use across the curriculum to further improve their written contributions.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- In numeracy and mathematics, almost all children make good progress at early level. A majority of children making good progress at first level. Almost all children make very good progress at second level.

Number, money and measure

- Most children at early level count within 20, use one-to-one correspondence and solve simple addition and subtraction problems confidently. At first level, a minority understand place value to 1,000 and apply mental strategies in contexts such as money. A few children confidently round numbers and use 24-hour time. Most children also estimate and measure accurately. At second level, most understand place value to one million, convert between fractions, decimals and percentages, and use 12- and 24-hour time. They solve two-step problems and convert units of measurement accurately. Children at first and second level need to develop a wider range of mental strategies and solve multi-step problems to strengthen accuracy and confidence.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, children use positional language confidently, including above, below and beside. At first level, a minority of children identify a range of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They identify a right angle and that it measures 90 degrees. They should now deepen their knowledge of compass directions. At second level, almost all children know and apply with accuracy the eight compass points. Almost all children working towards second level describe confidently the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They use specific vocabulary and have an increasing understanding between three-dimensional objects and their nets. Across the school, children need further and regular practice to help them to apply and consolidate their knowledge of shape, position and movement.

Information handling

- Children are developing well their skills in gathering, recording and displaying information. At early level, most children carry out surveys where they record information gathered using tally

marks. They present information clearly and competently using bar charts. Most children who have achieved first level extract key information from bar charts and tables. Almost all children at second level analyse and draw conclusions from a variety of sources including line graphs. Children at first and second level should apply their information handling skills further through using digital technology to support their learning.

Attainment over time

- In the last three years, children's attendance has remained above the national average. A few children have lower attendance. Senior leaders monitor well the attendance of these children. They are improving the attendance of a few children by working with partners to help address attendance issues. Senior leaders should continue to work with partners to find more impactful ways to raise attendance further for a few children to ensure they all receive their entitlement to a broad general education as best they can.
- Overall, children's attainment, at early and second level in literacy and numeracy shows upward improving trends in the last few years. Senior leaders correctly identified a dip at first level attainment in all organisers. Senior leaders have introduced more rigorous tracking for all children in literacy and numeracy across all stages of the school beyond P1, P4 and P7. This is helping them to identify emerging gaps in attainment more quickly. They have strengthened the quality of targeted interventions at the middle stages of the school. Although at an early stage, the school's data accurately reflects improvements at first level. This is supporting almost all children to attain second levels in reading, listening and talking and numeracy and most to achieve writing by the end of P7. Senior leaders should continue to monitor closely attainment across first level to ensure changes are constantly leading to improved outcomes for children.
- Almost all children, who require additional support make consistent and appropriate progress as they achieve personal targets over time. A few children have achieved improved progress over time and are working at expected levels of attainment for their age and stage.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children regularly celebrate achievements in school and beyond through assemblies, displays and digital sharing. As a result, they feel proud and talk confidently about their successes. These experiences help children recognise the skills they develop, including teamwork through sport, improved wellbeing through hobbies, and physical skills through active pursuits.
- Across the school, almost all children develop key life skills, including leadership, teamwork and citizenship, through roles such as pupil groups and community activities when engaging with local partners such as local farms and services. As a result, children build confidence, take responsibility and contribute positively to the school and local community. Older children increasingly link these skills to learning, life and work, and are beginning to describe the skills they are developing. Experiences such as supporting younger children and engaging with the community further strengthen their sense of responsibility and care for others. Senior leaders track children's participation in achievement activities in and out of school well. They should continue to develop current tracking systems to include a clearer overview of the skills all children achieve through participating in these experiences. This should support them to target those at risk of missing out and ensure equity in personal achievement as children progress through the school.

Equity for all learner

- Senior leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the socio-economic background of all children. They recognise families who may be affected by poverty and those at risk of being affected by the rural context of the school. Through the school, and in partnership with the highly supportive parent council, children have benefited from more digital devices and had access to paid transport to support educational trips. Through these efforts children benefit from a range of supports to remove barriers to participation and engage fully in the life of the school.
- Senior leaders use the Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) well to help individual children attain and improve their outcomes. For example, they provide effective targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy. As a result, identified children make accelerated progress with a few now attaining in line with national standards and expectations. Senior leaders should increase their focus on how well interventions are reducing the poverty related attainment gap for a few children.

Other relevant evidence

- From P1, all children learn French. Spanish is introduced in P5 and delivered in blocks as part of the school's approach to 1 + 2 languages.
- All children receive their entitlement to two hours of progressive PE each week.

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.