

Summarised inspection findings

Strathgarve Primary School

The Highland Council

17 September 2024

Key contextual information

Strathgarve Primary School is located in a rural setting serving the local community of Garve and surrounding areas. At the time of inspection there were seven children attending the school, ranging from P1 to 7. Children are taught together in a single multi-stage class. The school building, which sits beside the River Blackwater, consists of a single classroom space and ancillary accommodation. The headteacher has been in post since 2016. She is also headteacher of Marybank and Strathconon Primary Schools which, along with Strathgarve, form a tri-cluster of schools. Staff and children from these schools work together regularly. In the September 2022 Pupil Census, no children in P6 or P7 were registered for free school meals, compared to 12% in the local authority and 20% nationally. All children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation decile four.

1.3 Leadership of change

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

- Strathgarve Primary is a welcoming and inclusive school. Staff interactions with children are nurturing and child-centred. Families feel welcome in the school and regard it as an important part of the local community. The vision of working together to create an inclusive environment where everyone is valued and supported to achieve their best underpins the work of the school.
- Children, staff and parents were involved in reviewing the school's vision, values, aims and motto at the end of last session. The school's values, which consist of friendship, teamwork, kindness and creativity are evident across the school. Most children have a good understanding of the school values and can talk about how these relate to their lives. They recognise positive qualities when displayed by their peers. All children and adults demonstrate the values in their daily interactions with each other. This helps to maintain the school's nurturing and encouraging ethos.
- The headteacher is very well respected by children, staff, parents and the school's partners. She provides effective leadership, underpinned by her very encouraging and positive approach and vision for close community and cluster working. She is assisted well by a class teacher, support staff and partners. Together, they have successfully developed a collaborative and supportive culture.
- Staff have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the school. The headteacher has established effective quality assurance arrangements, including regular evaluation activities. She samples children's work, carries out lesson observations and holds regular focus group discussions with children. Working together, the headteacher and class teachers created a teaching and learning framework. They use this well to reflect on and evaluate their practice. This is helping to embed consistent, high-quality approaches in the classroom. The headteacher seeks feedback regularly and takes into consideration the views

and ideas from children and parents. This is shared through the improvement plan and standards and quality reporting and a 'you said, we did' board. Staff use a range of evidence well to help prioritise the most appropriate areas for development. Children should be supported to make greater use of evaluation tools including 'How Good is OUR school?' to evaluate the impact of improvements. In addition, staff should continue to consider ways to engage parents and partners meaningfully in planning and evaluating school improvement.

- The headteacher outlines the school's approach to raising attainment and improving children's wellbeing within the school improvement plan. There are clear connections between self-evaluation, improvement planning and professional learning. She manages appropriately the pace of change. This session, staff have considered and agreed priorities including children's rights, assessment moderation and attainment. The headteacher regularly involves children in evaluating the work of the school and planning positive change through focus groups and questionnaires. The headteacher should now summarise this evidence more concisely and select key messages to share. This will help to highlight the successful outcomes for children being achieved. There needs to be a sharper focus on actions to raise attainment.
- All staff are encouraged and empowered to embrace leadership opportunities in the school. Staff undertake leadership roles which contribute well to school improvement. They make effective use of termly teacher leadership days to take forward aspects of school improvement. Staff engage meaningfully with annual professional reviews. Staff undertake ongoing professional learning, including visits to other schools, to support aspects of learning and teaching such as outdoor learning. Their engagement with professional learning and leadership of change is resulting in improved experiences and outcomes for all children.
- Children take on lead roles such as buddies, playground leaders and as members of the pupil council. They also develop their leadership roles in the classroom with a variety of responsibilities. A majority of children feel their views are listened to and acted upon to influence change. Staff should continue to increase opportunities for meaningful leadership responsibilities for all children.
- All staff have a clear understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school. The headteacher has a strategic plan for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). She has allocated this funding effectively for additional staffing and resources to support children with their wellbeing and learning. The headteacher has led work to help parents to understand the purpose of PEF. She shares and seeks feedback from parents on the use of funding. As planned, the headteacher should continue to involve parents and children more fully in determining the focus of PEF to address any poverty related attainment gaps.

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

- All staff create an inclusive, supportive school culture. Children help one another and are proud of their school and community. Staff and children have worked together to create a class charter. Children have an appropriate understanding of their rights and those of others as a result of this successful work.
- There are positive relationships between all staff and children. Staff create and maintain a calm and purposeful learning environment. As a result, almost all children are attentive throughout learning times and cooperate very well in pairs and groups. Children show a positive attitude to learning and engage well in experiences across the curriculum. Children access a range of resources independently to support them to regulate their emotions. They engage in daily emotional check-ins and are increasing their readiness to learn through planned soft start activities. Teachers should now review the start of day routine to ensure learning time is maximised. Staff make use of local authority guidance to manage behaviour through professional learning sessions, for example, by educational psychology services.
- Staff have embedded helpful classroom and school routines. During lessons, teachers give clear instructions. They share expectations and high standards with children that support a positive school ethos. Across the curriculum, teachers provide differentiated tasks and activities that help children to engage with learning at the right level. Teachers use groupings well to provide learning experiences that meet the needs of most children. They ensure universal supports and resources, such as counting materials, are always available to help children with their learning. Children understand mistakes are part of learning and feel encouraged to give their best effort. Teachers use effective questioning to check for understanding, recall prior learning and promote curiosity. This supports children to engage well in learning. Teachers should develop their approaches to questioning to promote children's higher order thinking skills and to extend the level of challenge for a few individuals. Teachers share the purpose of lessons to support children to understand how they can be successful in their learning. To increase engagement and make the skills being developed more explicit for children, teachers should now incorporate greater pupil voice into shaping and agreeing success criteria.
- Staff are developing play pedagogy to support younger children's learning. They create stimulating spaces that foster independent, play-based experiences and encourage children's creativity. Children have opportunities for choice and enjoy trying a range of interesting activities. As planned, teachers should continue to develop further their approaches to play, taking account of national guidance. This will help staff to support children to build progressively on their skills and experiences through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) early and first levels.

- Teachers make very effective use of digital tools and resources to consolidate and support children's learning, for example, interactive whiteboards, videos and animation. This is a strength of the school. All children use tablets, laptops and digital tools with confidence. They use these independently to access, record and share aspects of their work using apps, online platforms and websites. A few children make regular use of accessibility tools, such as 'talk to text' features, to aid their writing. This supports children's independence and motivation.
- In most lessons, teachers use a range of formative assessment strategies and provide children with helpful verbal feedback. This supports children to better understand their next steps in learning. Teachers' written feedback does not always focus on supporting children to make progress. They should continue to refine their approaches to providing feedback to ensure it supports children progress towards their next steps in learning. The headteacher should continue to monitor this to ensure feedback is consistent and purposeful.
- Children are given regular opportunities to self-assess their work. Staff have helpfully introduced target setting with children. Children record their progress towards their targets in learning logs. They are not yet able to talk about or identify how these targets support them to make progress in their learning. They should now be given greater choice and opportunities to set targets and evaluate their progress. This will allow them to take increased responsibility for their own learning and understand their own progress as learners.
- The headteacher and staff have developed an assessment overview to coordinate the timing of assessments across the school. Teachers plan a range of assessments in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They recognise how these assessments support professional judgements on children's attainment and progress. The headteacher should now support teachers to develop further their use of high quality assessment. This should support children to demonstrate their learning in new and unfamiliar contexts more meaningfully.
- Teachers plan children's learning over a range of timescales and across the curriculum. Children have a meaningful voice in planning aspects of learning contexts. They share with teachers what they already know and what they want to know more about at the start of each topic. Teachers plan and prepare literacy and numeracy lessons well. In these areas, teachers carefully consider the stages of children in a multi-composite class to meet their individual needs. Teachers build on children's prior learning using the agreed lesson model and the local authority progression pathways to meet most children's needs. The staff team have developed curriculum overview planners to ensure appropriate coverage of all areas of the curriculum. As a next step, staff should work together to review their planning formats to ensure that learning for children working at different levels is identified clearly for all curricular areas.
- Staff track children's learning carefully. Teachers use manageable processes to monitor regularly the progress of every child in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. Teachers use the information gathered effectively to discuss and identify further support needed for groups and individuals and to plan next steps in learning. This is having a positive impact on closing identified gaps in learning including poverty related attainment gaps.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The headteacher has recently led work to create a curriculum rationale in consultation with learners, staff and parents. This is improving everyone's understanding of the purpose of the school's curriculum. Staff are beginning to use the rationale well to inform planning. They should continue to build upon the school's unique context and make use of the local area to develop further the curriculum.
- Teachers make effective use of curriculum frameworks across all subject areas. They use these to ensure children build on prior learning experiences and provide appropriate progression. This helps teachers to ensure that children develop important, progressive skills as they move through the school. Staff have bundled experiences and outcomes. These are used on a three-year context for learning cycle. This supports staff to ensure breadth and progression across the school. Planned experiences engage children in collaborative and investigative tasks developing key skills.
- Staff make effective use of the school grounds and local area to provide opportunities for outdoor learning on a regular basis. Children are increasing their understanding of the local environment as a result. To ensure children develop skills progressively and build on prior learning and experiences, the headteacher should support staff to develop a pathway for outdoor learning.
- Children benefit from a well-stocked, well-organised and inviting library space which provides a wide range of texts. Children enjoy using the library to select books for pleasure and for research. They also have access to a visiting mobile library on a regular basis. These facilities are supporting children to develop their literacy skills and develop a culture of reading.
- Across the school children learn French. There are opportunities for older children to develop their awareness of other languages including British Sign Language.
- Children in all classes receive regular religious education following the local authority progression pathways.
- Children benefit from well-planned transitions into the school from nursery. The headteacher protects time for staff to share learning and pastoral information. There is a well-established transition programme for children to transfer to secondary stage. There are also enhanced transition arrangements to meet individual learners' needs when required.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents value the positive relationships they have with the headteacher and staff team. They feel welcome to visit the school and are comfortable approaching staff and the headteacher if required. Parents appreciate the regular communication from the school through digital platforms and comprehensive newsletters. Parents have opportunities to visit the school for open days, parent contact and sharing learning events. They feel children have many positive opportunities for outdoor learning and high-quality experiences which enhance learning and teaching.
- The school does not currently have an active Parent Council. In previous years, the Parent Council has supported the school by raising funds to purchase outdoor play equipment. Most recently parents worked together to participate in a consultation held by the local authority on the future of the school in the community. As a next step, the headteacher should consider how to involve parents more fully in school improvement priorities. As planned, this should include the re-establishment of an active Parent Council.

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

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

- All staff have established a nurturing, supportive learning environment which embodies the school's values. This helps to create and maintain positive relationships amongst children and staff. Children are included and develop an awareness and understanding of their own wellbeing well as a result of these approaches.
- Most children are developing well their knowledge, understanding and the language of children's rights. As a result of children's efforts, the school has achieved a bronze national accreditation. Children have a genuine awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Almost all children talk with ease about their rights and what these mean for themselves and others.
- Most children are developing well their understanding of factors that impact on their own wellbeing. Children describe what it means to be safe, including how to keep safe near water and online. Almost all children identify a trusted adult they would speak to if they had any worries or concerns. This helps them to feel safe at school. Children access calm spaces in the classroom when they feel the need. Language linked to emotions is symbolised, displayed and used to support teaching and learning to help children better understand their feelings and emotions. Children should continue to strengthen their understanding of the wellbeing indicators to help them to reflect, talk about their needs and address their own wellbeing more independently. Staff should consider how to record and monitor children's wellbeing consistently. This can help to support children to develop a better understanding of their own wellbeing over time.
- Children develop appropriately their understanding of emotional and physical health as a result of the school's health and wellbeing (HWB) curriculum. Children have many opportunities to recognise and respond appropriately in a range of social situations. For example, children recognise and demonstrate kindness to others. Teachers make effective use of the HWB pathway, including national guidance on relationships, sexual health and parenthood. This ensures coverage of all HWB experiences and outcomes. Children's learning and wellbeing needs are being met effectively in HWB.
- All children receive their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education each week. Teachers make effective use of outdoor spaces to support aspects of the curriculum. Teachers recognise the benefit to children's mental and emotional wellbeing to spend time in the outdoor environment. Children engage successfully in a range of physical activities. Partners and volunteers support the delivery of a range of activities including football, safe cycling and swimming. As a result, almost all children feel that staff help them to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- Staff know that appropriate behaviour is an important factor in ensuring the wellbeing of children and staff. They respond to and support any children who present with low level disruptive behaviours using positive approaches to resolving difficulties. Children are

supportive and inclusive of each other when outdoors during break and lunchtime. The headteacher records and monitors reports of bullying. Most children feel that bullying is dealt with well. As planned, staff should now review their relationships policy to ensure it reflects the approaches taken to support children's relationships and behaviour.

- The headteacher and staff meet their statutory duties for wellbeing, equality and inclusion well, including in supporting children who need extra help. All staff contribute to the safeguarding of children and are confident with their responsibilities in relation to child protection.
- The headteacher has effective procedures in place to identify children who require additional support. She works well in partnership with staff and families to support children's needs and reduce potential barriers to learning. Staff plan effectively to address barriers to learning and involve parents in planning meetings. They use 'now and next' boards, visual timetables and daily literacy interventions. These approaches are helping to make the curriculum and learning more accessible to children. The headteacher should support staff to evaluate better the impact specific interventions have on children's progress and on closing gaps in learning.
- 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 the school and the school meals provider.
- Children are developing their awareness, understanding and appreciation of diversity, and different religious and cultural events. Staff promote this through class work and assemblies. Resources, including toys and library books, promote a range of diversity and cultures. Children celebrate various cultural occasions throughout the year such as Chinese New Year, Eid, Christmas and Burns' Day. Staff should continue to develop and support children's learning about equalities and inclusion. This should support children to feel able to recognise, and challenge confidently and knowledgeably, discrimination and intolerance.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

- Children's progress and attainment is expressed in overall statements rather than for specific year groups. This is because of the very small numbers of children at each stage.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. The majority of children across the school have achieved, or are on track to achieve, expected levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff need to maintain a stronger focus on raising children's attainment in literacy and numeracy.
- Almost all children requiring additional support are making satisfactory progress towards their targets in learning. This includes children for whom English is an additional language.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, most children listen very well to staff and each other in teacher-led activities and group tasks. Almost all children follow instructions well. They take turns to talk and listen to each other during learning activities. Younger children express ideas and show their understanding by answering questions. A few children need to be encouraged to take their turn or to share their thoughts. Most older children contribute ideas confidently. They listen carefully, recount experiences and build on the ideas of peers well. They would like more opportunities to present their work to a variety of audiences. Children recognise this would help to develop further their listening and talking skills and confidence.

Reading

- Younger children identify initial sounds. They retell familiar stories using small world toys and pictures. They are not yet confident blending sounds or reading simple words. Most children read well with fluency and expression, appropriate to their age and stage. They use a range of appropriate strategies to help them read new and unfamiliar words. The majority of older children offer a personal preference for authors and the type of books they enjoy. As children move through the school, they explain clearly how the author, cover or title influence their choice of books when reading for enjoyment. They are less confident answering complex questions about the texts they are reading.

Writing

- Overall, children are making satisfactory progress in writing. Staff have correctly identified raising attainment in writing as an area of school improvement. Effective strategies are being implemented to support individuals in writing. Younger children are mark making and enthusiastic about writing. They need to develop further their fine motor control and form lower

case letters correctly. They are not yet writing simple words independently or creating their own stories without adult support. As children move through the school, they are developing their writing skills appropriate to their stage to include punctuation, connectives and interesting vocabulary. They will benefit from continued writing practice for real-life audiences and for different purposes across the curriculum.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children count forward and backwards within ten. They recognise groups of objects to ten and are beginning to explore addition. As children move through the school, they use a range of strategies to add and subtract mentally. Older children read, write and order six-digit numbers. When adding and multiplying, they choose different strategies and justify their choice well. Older children apply their understanding of multiplication effectively to calculate the area of squares, rectangles and right-angled triangles. Across the school children are not yet confident in applying learning in new and unfamiliar contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- Children name and discuss features of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects successfully, appropriate to their stage of learning. Younger children understand and use the language of position, including in front, behind, forwards and backwards. They can identify symmetry in a range of contexts. Older children are not confident using a broad range of mathematical vocabulary such as that associated with circles.

Information handling

- Across the school, children are aware of ways to gather information, for example, through questionnaires and surveys. All children would benefit from learning more regularly about information handling skills.

Attainment over time

- The small school roll and numbers of children at each stage mean that any trends in attainment data overtime are unreliable. Year on year, attainment data fluctuates due to ongoing changes in the school roll and the number of children at each stage.
- Staff track well the progress individual children are making towards meeting their individual targets. This progress is aligned to Curriculum for Excellence levels. The staff team has accurately identified aspects of attainment which require particular focused support for each individual and are implementing successfully appropriate strategies to support this. This includes aspects of listening and talking, writing and numeracy.
- Teachers are making increased use of the national Benchmarks to assess children's progress and attainment. They have engaged in a range of moderation activities across the tri-cluster network of schools. This is supporting them to make increasingly confident judgements about children's achievement of a level. As planned, the headteacher should support teachers to moderate different areas of the curriculum with colleagues in other schools.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated in a variety of ways. These include school displays, sharing learning through an online platform and assemblies. Children gain confidence and achieve success within and outwith school, for example, through activities such as art and music clubs. Children are working with the extended school community to develop the school garden. As a result, they are gaining and developing their leadership and teamwork skills.

- The headteacher tracks children's participation and achievements and links these to the four capacities of CfE. She uses this information to target activities for those children who may be at risk of missing out. Staff should now discuss and track the skills children are gaining from achievements and link these to skills for learning, life and work. This should help children to make links between their achievements, learning and progress.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a strong understanding of the range of barriers to learning children may face. They are particularly aware of the unique challenges faced by children and families in rural communities. Issues such as affordable transport, increased travel times and social isolation are carefully considered and addressed to ensure equitable experiences for children. They are keen that no child misses out due to financial hardship. They seek and secure funding from a range of sources and use this to reduce the cost of activities, trips and resources. As a result, of funded experiences, children are developing resilience and confidence and building knowledge outwith their own local lived experiences.
- Children benefit from learning with children in other rural schools. This ensures equity in participating in sports events. Children have early residential transition activities so that they foster friendships with peers in other rural schools as they move to Dingwall Academy. This is increasing children's confidence.
- The headteacher uses PEF to provide universal support across the school. This includes a focus on building resilience and supporting children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Early evidence shows these approaches are helping identified children to make better progress in literacy and close gaps caused by absence. Moving forward the headteacher and staff should have a stronger focus on accelerated progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- The headteacher monitors children's attendance carefully. She is proactive when attendance levels give cause for concern. She liaises closely with parents to offer support to improve attendance and address concerns. Overall attendance is below the national average. There are a few children whose low attendance levels have a negative impact on their progress in learning and attainment. Staff are working with colleagues from social work and partners, including child and adolescent mental health services, to provide targeted support to reduce this barrier to learning. This is leading to improved attendance for identified children. There have been no exclusions.

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.