

Summarised inspection findings

St Serf's Primary School

North Lanarkshire Council

23 September 2025

Key contextual information

St Serf's Primary School is a denominational school which serves the Thrashbush area of Airdrie. The school also incorporates early learning and childcare provision. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 181 children organised across eight classes.

The headteacher has been in post since 2015. The headteacher is supported by one full-time principal teacher and two part-time, job-share principal teachers.

Approximately 86% of children who attend the school live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 and 2. At the time of inspection, the school reported 50% of children on the roll as requiring additional support with their learning. There are approximately 43% of children in P6 and P7 registered for free school meals.

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

- Across the school, strong, positive relationships between staff and children, and between children, are evident. The effective teamwork of all staff serves to strengthen these relationships. Children are friendly, well mannered, confident and articulate. Children and staff demonstrate the school values of love, care and forgiveness in their interactions with each other and visitors to the school. Children and staff have worked well together to develop a rights-based approach which reflects well the school and Gospel values. This has allowed the school to achieve national accreditation for their work on promoting children's rights. A few children find it difficult to engage in their learning. Staff provide effective and sensitive support which ensures learning is not disrupted. Staff support children very well to develop and maintain positive, nurturing relationships with their peers. Overall, children behave very well and engage positively in their learning.
- Almost all teachers ensure learning experiences are relevant and interesting. In almost all lessons, teachers match learning well to children's individual needs and interests. In a minority of lessons, teachers provide worthwhile experiences for children who require additional challenge in their learning. As a result, children are motivated and eager to extend their learning. In a few lessons, children have opportunities to lead their own learning. Staff should continue to build on good practice to provide more opportunities for personalisation and choice.
- Staff's application of a 'good lesson' model supports effectively the consistency of children's learning experiences across the school. In all lessons, teachers provide clear instructions and explanations. Teachers use questioning well to check for understanding and to extend children's thinking. All teachers routinely share the purpose of learning and success criteria at the start of each lesson. In a few lessons, success criteria are differentiated. This supports children well to understand what they are learning and how to be successful. In a few lessons,

children co-construct success criteria. Teachers should work together to extend this approach across all classes.

- Most teachers use formative assessment strategies effectively to monitor and support children's learning and adjust approaches to learning and teaching. Almost all teachers provide helpful written and oral feedback to effectively support children's next steps in learning. This includes the use of matrix bar codes where feedback from teachers and peers is recorded orally for children to listen to and revisit. Teachers provide children with regular opportunities to self and peer assess their learning in literacy. This supports them to know their next steps in their learning. As planned, teachers should further develop the use of learner conversations to support children to agree their learning targets.
- Staff create and maintain calm and purposeful learning environments. Children have opportunities to learn in a range of different relevant and stimulating contexts. Staff are at the early stages of using outdoor learning to develop and apply skills across the curriculum. A newly developed garden area and the recently enhanced school grounds could support this work. Staff should continue to develop outdoor learning to ensure that children's experiences are progressive and part of planned learning.
- Teachers use digital technologies very effectively to deliver and extend learning. Almost all children show skill in using digital technology in their learning. Children use a range of digital resources and technologies very well across the curriculum. Children enjoy learning through the use of a range of relevant online programmes and applications to support their learning. Younger children use matrix codes to access stories and use programmable robots to plan routes. Older children use tablet computers to record and evaluate their learning. Teachers are well placed to continue to develop digital skills across the school.
- At early level, play is integrated well into the day. There is an appropriate balance of child-led and adult-initiated learning. Teachers make effective use of play approaches and plan spaces, interactions and provocations well to support learning in line with national guidance. The learning environment reflects children's interests well and promotes curiosity and creativity.
- All teachers use a range of assessments to support learning and teaching which allows children to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills development in literacy and numeracy. As planned, there should be a clear focus on children's skills progression in all curricular areas evidencing attainment over time.
- Teacher professional judgements are increasingly reliable and based on robust evidence. All teachers use a range of diagnostic, summative and standardised assessments to gather information about children's learning and development. Teachers are committed to ensuring current practice in the effective use of the learning, teaching and assessment cycle allows them to develop shared expectations of standards. Teachers work in trios, with a clear focus on improving standards in learning, teaching and assessment. This robust, collaborative approach includes peer visits and high-quality professional dialogue. It ensures children benefit from increasingly consistent approaches across the school.
- Teachers use high quality assessments very effectively. These are well-planned and make links to learning across the curriculum. This ensures breadth, depth and application in children's learning. Teachers work in partnership with a local primary school to ensure a robust approach to moderation. This supports all teachers to have shared expectations and standards. Teachers should continue to refine these processes to ensure they directly evidence impact on learners' progress and raise attainment.

- Teachers plan over different timescales using Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. Planning is proportionate, manageable, and differentiated to meet the needs of learners. Teachers make effective use of progressive learning pathways in literacy and numeracy. They should continue to develop these in all curricular areas to ensure skills progression.
- Teachers engage in three tracking meetings per year, where they discuss children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Teachers work with senior leaders to identify targeted interventions for children with gaps in learning. The impact of these interventions should now be more robustly measured to identify progress and set next steps in learning for individual and groups of children.
- Teachers are developing well skills of data analysis focused on improvement. Senior leaders should now support staff to take further ownership of their data at classroom level. This should support teachers to improve their understanding of children's progress and evaluate which approaches are having the biggest impact on children's attainment.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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, most children attain expected levels in listening and talking, reading and numeracy. Across the school the majority of children attain expected levels in writing. A few children are capable of achieving more.
- Staff track the progress made by children in receipt of specific targeted literacy and numeracy interventions. The majority of children supported through targeted interventions make good progress towards individual targets. Children who require additional support with their learning make good progress. Senior leaders should now develop more robust systems to identify the progress children with additional support needs make.

Attainment in literacy and English

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

Listening and talking

- At early level, the majority of children answer questions from other children and adults appropriately. They follow simple instructions. At first level, most children take turns and contribute appropriately and respectfully in group discussions. They speak clearly and audibly and share information logically. At second level, most children share and justify their views clearly and with confidence. They listen carefully to the views of others and build on these with their own opinions. Across the school, a few children need to develop further their listening and turn taking skills. This should include a planned and progressive approach to develop the skills of talking and listening.

Reading

- At early level, the majority of children use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read unfamiliar words. They answer simple questions about events and characters in the texts. At first level, most children read aloud a familiar piece of text fluently. They explain well key features which help them select texts to read, such as the title, author, and illustrations on the cover. At second level, most children share their thoughts, opinions and main ideas about structure, characters and setting. They explain why they choose books by selected authors with detail about plot, characters, settings and styles.

Writing

At early level, most children are beginning to write simple sentences, starting with a capital letter and ending with a full stop. Most children are beginning to form letters correctly. Children need to develop further independent writing skills and apply simple punctuation more accurately. At first level, the majority of children use appropriate structure and vocabulary across a range of genre. The majority of children write independently punctuating most sentences accurately. A minority of children need to improve their skills in applying spelling in

different contexts and would benefit from understanding strategies and rules of spelling to help them improve. At second level, the majority of children write for a range of purposes across the curriculum. Most children use paragraphs effectively to separate their thoughts and ideas and organise information in a logical way. They should continue to develop the use of emotive and figurative language in their writing to engage, persuade or influence the reader. At first and second level, children need to be able to apply their writing skills in quality extended texts across a range of genre.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are making very good progress.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, the majority of children order numbers forward and backwards within 0 – 30. They use one-to-one correspondence accurately to count a given number of objects to 20. They are less confident when talking about measuring weight. At first level, most children round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They use the correct notation for common fractions and explain the role of numerator and denominator. They understand simple equivalent fractions. Children should continue to develop their awareness of how goods can be paid for using cards and digital technology. At second level, most children partition a range of whole numbers and decimal fractions to three decimal places. They calculate simple percentages of a quantity and use this knowledge to solve problems. They should continue to develop their ability to link mathematical concepts and apply these to real-life situations.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, the majority of children recognise, sort and describe common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. They programme digital toys to make them move forward and backwards along a given route. They should continue to extend their understanding of symmetry. At first level, most children use appropriate mathematical language to describe the properties of 3D objects. They describe, follow and record directions using words associated with angles, directions and turns. At second level, most children use mathematical language including acute, obtuse and reflex to describe and classify a range of angles. They should develop further their ability to complete a range of symmetrical patterns using digital technology.

Information handling

- At early level, the majority of children ask questions to collect data for a specific purpose. They use their knowledge of colour, shape and size to sort objects. They should continue to develop their ability to answer simple questions about information in a graph. At first level, most children use a variety of different methods to display data, including bar graphs and tables. They use mathematical vocabulary appropriately to describe the likelihood of events happening. At second level, most children make confident use of digital technology to create graphs and charts. They analyse and interpret a variety of data. They should continue to develop their ability to draw conclusions about the reliability of data.

Attainment over time

- Tracking of individual year groups over time indicates a sustained increase in listening and talking at all stages. Most individual year groups show a sustained increase in attainment overtime in reading and writing. The majority of individual year groups have sustained an increase in attainment in numeracy. Some significant increases have been made over time for individual year group cohorts. Overall, there has been overall increase in attainment in reading, listening and talking and numeracy since the COVID pandemic. However, year on year performance has been variable.

- Overall attendance for session 2023/24 was 85.5%, which was below the local authority and national average. Just over half of children (51.3%) missed more than 10% of their education. At the time of the inspection, attendance was 87.4%, well below the local authority average of 92.5%. Over the past four years, unauthorised absence levels were over double the local authority average, with little evidence of improvement. A few children are on part-time timetables, supported by relevant planning and subject to ongoing review.
- Raising attendance is rightly identified as a key priority for improvement. To raise the profile of good attendance, staff have trialled a new school motto this session, 'learning minutes matter, because they make us smarter'. A project was undertaken to improve attendance for targeted individuals. However, data showed it did not have the intended impact. Although these approaches are beginning to help children understand why attendance is important they are not yet leading to improvement. Senior leaders, working in partnership with staff, parents and partners need to increase their expectations of children's attendance. Greater rigour and more frequent strategic monitoring are required to make improvements. Senior leaders would benefit from looking outwards to learn from effective practice in other schools.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's achievements are celebrated and shared using attractive wall displays throughout the school. Children welcome opportunities to discuss and celebrate their achievements with their peers and at weekly assemblies. Most children's involvement in pupil committees enables them to contribute and take responsibility for aspects of the school's work. This supports children to be effective contributors. Across the school, most children are motivated to gain points for their school 'house', developing their sense of teamwork and responsibility. The 'Going for Gold' award system encourages and motivates most children to be success and achieve.
- Almost all children feel that they have opportunities to take part in activities beyond the school day. Children across the school have regular opportunities to engage in sporting activities, developing their fitness, confidence and teamwork. Groups of children have opportunities to represent the school at North Lanarkshire Council sporting competitions, such as cross country. In partnership with Active Schools, children's participation in these activities increased this year.
- Although staff track children's participation in sporting activities, they are not yet tracking children's achievements. Senior leaders should now build on their current approach to tracking equity in sport by tracking children's skills and achievements. This should support staff take appropriate action to remove barriers to participation.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know the context of the school well. This includes an awareness of the cultural and socio-economic context of children and families. All staff ensure that poverty does not prevent pupil participation in any event or experience. As planned, the headteacher should now update and develop the poverty proofing policy to ensure there are effective systems in place to promote equity for all learners.
- Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is used to enhance staffing and purchase resources. There is limited evidence to demonstrate the impact of PEF on accelerating children's progress. Staff need to track rigorously the attainment of identified individuals and groups to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions. The headteacher now needs to ensure that the planning, implementation and impact of this support is closely monitored. This will help show which interventions are having the biggest impact, accelerating learning and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Other relevant evidence

- Children access two hours of high-quality physical education per week.
- All children learn Spanish progressively from P1 to P7 as part of the 1 + 2 language policy. Children in P5 to P7 also learn French.
- Children experience a progressive and faith-based pathway for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools.
- Staff and children are working towards a reading school award. As part of this work children in P7 are buddies for children in P1 to encourage reading for enjoyment. As planned, staff should continue to ensure that the school provides a literacy rich environment which fosters a love of reading. This should include enhancing school libraries with a wide choice in reading materials and enticing reading areas. This should encourage children to read for enjoyment and further enhance their literacy skills.

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.