HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Summarised inspection findings

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School

Dumfries and Galloway Council

19 May 2026

Key contextual information

St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School serves the town of Stranraer and surrounding rural area. The school roll is 26 children arranged across two multi-composite classes. The headteacher has been in post since January 2024. She is also headteacher of Portpatrick Primary School as part of a partnership arrangement. The headteacher is supported by a principal teacher. Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles one to three. Children's attendance is above the national average. There have been no children excluded from school in recent years. In September 2024, the school reported that 29% of children had an identified additional support need. In September 2024, 33% of children in P6 and P7 were registered for free school meals.

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	

- The headteacher and staff promote a positive climate for learning. This is based on the school values of wellbeing, respect and perseverance, and underpinned by the Gospel Values. Relationships across the school community are consistently respectful, inclusive and supportive. Staff have worked with children effectively to establish a learning environment founded on children's rights. This is demonstrated through the daily interactions of staff and children. The school's purposeful work on children's rights was recognised through external validation. Children are welcoming to visitors, proud of their school and enjoy sharing their achievements.

- The headteacher places great value in fostering a caring and compassionate school community. She works well with all staff to create an ethos for learning where children feel valued, included and a strong sense of belonging. All staff know children and families very well. They respond sensitively to the needs of individuals. As a result, children are motivated and eager to do well in learning. They engage meaningfully when working independently, in pairs and in groups. The calm, purposeful learning environment helps almost all children to sustain high levels of engagement with learning.

- Children across the school generally behave very well and interact positively with their peers and staff. Staff promote clear expectations, aligned to children's rights. They use restorative and nurturing approaches effectively to support a few children who may become dysregulated on occasion. They respond to these situations appropriately and calmly which ensures children's learning continues. Staff use emotional check ins and monitor those who require support routinely. This helps almost all children to feel ready and confident to learn.

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- Pupil support assistants help children who require additional support with learning well. A few children use assistive tools confidently to help them to complete tasks. Teachers provide a range of scaffolded activities to help children learn. They should provide more children with opportunities to have greater ownership and independence over their learning. A few children require increased challenge in their learning.

- Children benefit from regular, well-planned opportunities for outdoor learning. Teachers use digital technology purposefully to enhance aspects of learning and children's engagement. Children use digital games effectively to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. They use media and coding resources successfully to develop creative and computational thinking skills. Teachers should continue to develop more rich and creative contexts for learning across curricular areas. This includes opportunities for children to be more active in their learning, to engage in more group and paired work, and to exercise more personalisation and choice over how they learn. This has the potential to promote children's interest and motivation for learning further.

- Teachers use effective classroom routines that help children to settle and focus on learning quickly. They structure lessons using agreed expectations and consistent teaching approaches. They engage with well-considered professional learning to develop their use of effective pedagogy across the school. All teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. In all lessons, they share learning intentions and success criteria, which helps children to understand the purpose of learning and measures of success. Teachers routinely review children's progress using success criteria during plenaries. Staff use questioning well to recap prior learning and to check for children's understanding. They should continue to develop their use of higher-order questions during lessons and plenaries. As a next step, teachers should help children to think more deeply about their learning and to develop their higher order thinking skills further.

- Teachers have engaged in local authority professional learning relating to play-based approaches. As a result, they are beginning to develop the learning environment appropriately to ensure it is able to support learning through play for younger children. This work is at an early stage of development and there is significant scope to develop this approach further to ensure children benefit from learning through play.

- Children set helpful, personal targets relating to literacy, numeracy and other areas of the curriculum. Teachers use learning conversations successfully to ensure children play an active role in identifying and reviewing their own targets. Children share with parents their targets and examples of work, showing their progress in learning well through a digital application. Teachers ensure children's targets are reviewed and updated regularly. A few children would benefit from more challenging and specific targets to accelerate their progress in learning.

- Teachers use a range of assessments effectively to measure children's progress and attainment in literacy, numeracy and, increasingly, across all curricular areas. They use well-planned standardised, summative and formative assessments regularly. Teachers conduct assessment tasks at the beginning and end of blocks of planned of learning. This helps them to measure children's progress in learning accurately. Teachers use self- and peer- assessment routinely to help children to reflect on learning. They should continue to support children to develop their skills in offering meaningful feedback during peer-assessments.

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- Teachers engage in regular moderation activities within the school and across their local school partnership. They use national Benchmarks appropriately to support their understanding of national standards. The headteacher recognised the need for further collaborative moderation relating to writing standards. She established the local 'Small Rural Schools Moderation Group' with schools in a similar context. This network has enabled purposeful moderation activities, allowing teachers to validate their professional judgements. Teachers' effective use of national standards and moderation activities ensures their judgements about progress in literacy and numeracy are accurate.

- Teachers engage in helpful professional learning on formative assessment techniques to inform their daily practice. They use these approaches well, such as children co-creating success criteria and reviewing progress against measures of success. Teachers should continue to develop their confidence in routinely adapting learning based on information gathered from formative assessment. This will help them to address any gaps in children's understanding proactively. For example, teachers should consider when learners need to revisit aspects of learning, adopt retrieval practice or challenge any misconceptions.

- Children benefit from regular verbal feedback from teachers which offers them encouragement. Teachers also provide high-quality, individualised written feedback for children, particularly for literacy work. This helps most children understand well how to make further improvements to their work. Teachers should continue to provide focused written feedback for children across all areas of the curriculum.

- Teachers plan learning appropriately across the short, medium and long term, aligning with Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. They are extending children's involvement in planning well by seeking their views on what they learn. They developed effectively a whole-school four-year rolling programme across all curricular areas. This helps teachers to provide appropriate learning which is progressive and ensures breadth of learning. They should now ensure planning for learning also provides all children with sufficient challenge and depth of learning across the curriculum.

- The headteacher and staff have developed robust and rigorous approaches to tracking and monitoring the progress and attainment of groups and individual children. The headteacher meets with teachers regularly to review tracking data and to identify interventions to support those children who are 'off track' in their learning. Staff use tracking data robustly to measure the impact of interventions, with the progress of individual children monitored over time effectively to ensure improvements are impactful and sustained.

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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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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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 and progress will be expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels. This is because of the very small numbers of children at each stage.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, all children achieve national standards for listening and talking. Almost all children achieve national standards in reading, numeracy and mathematics. Most children achieve national standards in writing. Staff maintain detailed tracking records which show that most children are predicted to achieve national standards this year. Most children who require additional support with their learning make appropriate progress towards their individual targets and milestones.

Attainment in literacy and English

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

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children communicate confidently with each other and adults. They listen to, and follow instructions well. Younger children demonstrate their learning well by presenting to classmates or parents. Children should be supported to develop their confidence in sharing their views and responding appropriately to the views of others during group and class discussions. Older children enjoy creating and performing Scottish poems for a range of audiences. They use vocal projection and emphasis well to engage an audience. They would benefit from developing their use of non-verbal cues during discussion, such as nodding and maintaining eye contact. They should be supported to consider how to build on the ideas of their peers during debates, by clarifying points and asking questions.

Reading

- Most children read fluently with expression. Most younger children use appropriate strategies to decode unknown words by locating and pronouncing familiar letter patterns and blends. They need more support to identify the features of a non-fiction text. Almost all older children respond effectively to questions about a text they know well, including inferential and evaluative questions. They share their thoughts and opinions about character and plot confidently. They should continue to be encouraged to develop their ability to discuss the writer's use of language, structure and setting.

- Teachers continue to develop children's enthusiasm for reading. They have worked well with children to improve the school library. Children share book recommendations, engage in peer

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reading initiatives and ensure the library is an attractive and welcoming environment. Staff should continue to promote reading for pleasure to all children across the school.

Writing

- Most younger children enjoy creating texts for a range of purposes. They start sentences in a variety of ways to engage the reader and use common conjunctions accurately. Older children identify well the features of different types of writing, including procedural texts. They write poems on different subjects, demonstrating an understanding of the features of poetry such as rhyme and descriptive language. They should be encouraged to write at greater length with increasing independence. Children across the school need to be reminded to ensure they plan and review their writing routinely, with a focus on checking their spelling and punctuation to make improvements. Teachers should continue to improve the quality of children's handwriting and the presentation of their writing across the school.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics

- Most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children need opportunities to develop further their numeracy skills in real-life and relevant contexts across the curriculum.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children read, write, order and recite whole numbers to 1000. They need more practice to develop their skills in adding and subtracting mentally. Older children use knowledge of equivalent forms of common fractions, decimal fractions and percentages to solve problems. They calculate simple percentages of a quantity and use this knowledge confidently to solve problems in everyday contexts. Younger children tell the time using an analogue clock appropriate to their age and stage. They need more practice of 'quarter to' and 'quarter past' times. Older children read and record time in both 12 hour and 24 hour notation and convert between the two with confidence. They need further practice to calculate durations of events including situations bridging across hours and parts of hours. Younger children use knowledge of everyday objects to provide reasonable estimates of length. They make accurate use of a range of instruments, including rulers and measuring jugs. Older children convert between common units of measurement using decimal notation. All children should be encouraged to develop their money skills across the curriculum.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children are beginning to name, identify and classify a range of simple two-dimensional (2D) shapes and three-dimensional (3D) objects. They use mathematical language accurately to describe the properties of a range of common 2D shapes and 3D objects. Older children apply knowledge of 2D shape to demonstrate understanding of the relationship between 3D objects and their nets. All children would benefit from more exploratory and creative learning to support investigation of objects and shapes.

Information handling

- Children develop their skills in gathering data well in a range of ways and for a given purpose, such as a survey or group tallies. Children should be encouraged to demonstrate their data-handling skills by displaying information in a range of ways, including using digital technology.

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Attainment over time

- Generally, most children make good progress over time. Staff track the progress of children in literacy and numeracy effectively using robust and reliable monitoring and tracking. They analyse data gathered carefully to plan well-considered interventions to raise attainment.

- Overall, attendance data for session 2024/25 was 96.4%. School attendance data remains consistently high and above national and local data. Staff have robust systems to monitor and track children's attendance. They act promptly when individual attendance drops below 90%. Staff identify family holidays during term time as impacting on overall levels of attendance. The headteacher promotes well the importance of regular attendance at school and the impact that non-attendance has on children's attainment. No children access a part-time timetable, and no child has been excluded from school in the last five years.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff are committed to providing children with a wide range of opportunities beyond the classroom. As a result, children achieve well through participation in leadership roles, pupil voice groups and achievement activities. All children take on these responsibilities well, which develops their confidence, resilience and important skills for learning, life and work.

- Staff's work with a range of partners, volunteers and parents to extend children's experiences is a strength of the school. This includes well-considered digital projects, intergenerational work and sports programmes. These help children to build positive relationships and an appreciation for their wider community. Staff, children, parents and partners work very well together to ensure children's achievements are recognised through national awards. This extends to work relating to children's rights, digital learning, sustainability and sport. This recognition highlights the breadth and quality of children's achievements, underpinned by the school's very strong sense of community.

- Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated regularly through assemblies, displays and digital platforms. Children recognise and value the importance of regular achievements. Staff track children's participation effectively, allowing them to identify those who need more support to access opportunities. Children record their developing skills using a digital platform. Staff have plans in place to develop their approaches to tracking skills further. They should continue to support all children to ensure they are able to identify and discuss their skills development and progression over time with confidence.

Equity for all learners

- Staff understand well the social and economic circumstances of children and families. They provide timely and appropriate support where needed. The headteacher and staff track attainment, wellbeing, attendance and participation carefully and use data to identify and reduce barriers for children. The headteacher consults with staff and parents on the use of Pupil Equity Funding. She demonstrates comprehensively how the school is accelerating the progress of almost all children impacted by socio-economic circumstances.

- Staff and partners take effective action to reduce the cost of the school day. This includes through a free breakfast club, funding for trips and residential experiences. They provide practical support for families, such as by offering clothing and resources, ensuring barriers to participation are removed. This ensures all children take part fully in all aspects of school life.

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Other relevant evidence

- Teachers are developing the religious education (RE) curriculum well with staff from across Scotland and with partners. This work seeks to provide RE that is cohesive and progressive within the multi-composite setting.
- Children receive their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education per week.
- All children from P1 to P7 learn French and children from P5 to P7 learn Spanish, in line with the national expectations of the '1+2 Languages' initiative.

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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.

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