

Summarised inspection findings

Hill of Fearn Primary School

The Highland Council

20 January 2026

Key contextual information

Hill of Fearn Primary School is a non-denominational school. It is situated in a rural setting in the village of Fearn, which is just outside Tain in Highland Council.

There are currently 33 children in the primary school. They are taught in two multi-stage classes, P1 to P3 and P4 to P7. There is also a nursery class which currently has three children in attendance. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the nursery.

The headteacher took up post as acting headteacher in February 2023 and became permanent in June 2024. She is also the headteacher of another school in the local authority. The headteacher is supported by a principal teacher who works across both schools and teaches one day each week. Currently most children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile 5, with a few children in SIMD deciles 1, 2 and 6. There are 28% of children with an identified additional support need. There are a few children with English as an additional language.

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 have developed highly nurturing and positive relationships with children. They know children and families very well. This allows them to sensitively adapt learning experiences to meet the needs of all children well. Staff have created an attractive and welcoming environment, with inviting learning spaces and classrooms. As a result, almost all children are motivated to learn and engage very well with learning activities. The headteacher worked effectively in partnership with staff, children and families to develop the school values and vision. These are now relevant and meaningful for children. Children have a clear understanding of and demonstrate clearly the school values.
- Almost all children behave very well, showing kindness, care and empathy for one another. Where a few children may become dysregulated at times, staff support children very effectively. They work together, using agreed approaches, to enable children to be calm and settle quickly. Older children encourage and support younger children well during learning and at breaktimes.
- Staff develop children's understanding of their rights successfully through creating class charters. They have begun to link learning to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, helping children to learn what their rights are and what they mean for them. The pupil 'Rights Respecters' leadership group help to introduce 'right of the fortnight' at assemblies. For example, children recently learned about the importance of their right to be heard during lessons about local elections. All children took part in meaningful elections for the pupil council. Staff should continue to extend this work to further support children, parents and the local community to embed and strengthen everyone's understanding of children's rights.

- All teachers share the purpose of learning during lessons, explaining clearly what children need to do to be successful in learning. In a few lessons, teachers involve children in sharing what they think and discussing what they need to do to be successful in learning. As a next step, all teachers should support children across the school to create these steps to success. All teachers provide clear instructions and explanations during learning which helps children to remain focused. Teachers plan learning well to meet the needs of children in the multi-stage classes. They challenge and support children appropriately, providing learning at the right level of difficulty. Support staff skilfully assist children who require additional support with learning, helping them to engage purposefully during lessons. They assist children effectively to consolidate learning, using well-considered literacy and numeracy interventions. All teachers have high expectations of children, which is resulting in a few children at all stages working beyond expectations.
- Teachers use a range of questions appropriately to extend children's thinking during learning. They encourage children to learn in a variety of ways, working in groups, pairs and individually. Children have a few opportunities to share their views on what and how they learn. Teachers should now build on this. They should support children to have increased choices and to lead further aspects of learning. All staff work closely together to reflect on and plan children's experiences. They support each other very well, sharing resources and ideas. It would be beneficial for teachers now to develop a Hill of Fearn learning and teaching policy. This should help to ensure that high quality approaches to learning and teaching are agreed and used consistently by staff across all learning experiences.
- Staff lead the development of play pedagogy very successfully across the school. They engage in high-quality professional learning and support colleagues well across the cluster in developing approaches to play. Children in the early years class experience high-quality learning through play. Staff have developed the environment both inside the classroom and in the free-flow outdoor space very effectively. They provide children with rich resources to promote sustained play and learning. Staff observe children's interactions and interact skilfully to enhance and extend children's learning where appropriate. There is a careful balance of child led and adult led learning activities. This is resulting in children becoming increasingly independent, creative and able to problem-solve together. As planned, staff should continue to build on the positive approach to developing play across the school.
- Children are highly enthusiastic about opportunities to learn outdoors, for example, using natural resources during numeracy lessons and developing a 'bug hotel'. Staff should continue with plans to develop a progressive outdoor learning programme with more regular outdoor learning experiences across all classes.
- Teachers use digital learning well to support and extend children's learning. All children in P4 to P7 have an individual laptop and children in the younger class share laptops. Children have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. Children who act as 'digital leaders' help staff and peers to develop their skills in using technology. Children use apps and online resources well to reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The headteacher has developed a helpful assessment calendar which ensures a consistent approach to assessment across the school. This includes formative and summative assessments across the year in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers have developed high quality assessments which support children well to demonstrate their learning across more than one curricular area. Children, teachers and parents have an opportunity to comment on the quality of learning through these assessment tasks. Teachers use valid assessments appropriately to identify gaps in learning for individuals or groups, and they plan relevant next steps accordingly. Children add to pupil profiles which evidence clearly their

progress across the curriculum. They set termly targets to help them to know their next steps in learning. Teachers use verbal feedback and praise appropriately during learning. This ensures most children know what they are doing well and what they need to continue to work on. Children are beginning to develop skills in self- and peer-assessment and should be supported to develop these further.

- Teachers use an online app to regularly share children's learning with parents. This allows parents to support learning at home and to know what their children are working on across curricular areas. Parents receive an annual report card and termly high-quality assessments to help them know how well their child is progressing. They value these opportunities to be involved in their child's learning.
- Teachers plan learning well to meet the needs of children in multi-stage classes using progressive planners for all curricular areas. They share helpful termly overviews with parents. The headteacher reviews planning with teachers to ensure there is appropriate depth and challenge.
- The headteacher has implemented more rigorous tracking and attainment meetings with teachers. Together, they review the progress and attainment of all children each term. They identify where children are on track, working beyond expectations or where children are not yet on track and are working towards their own targets. During these robust meetings, the headteacher and teachers plan timely interventions. This means that individual children and groups receive appropriate help at the right time. As a result, children make positive progress as they move through the school.
- All teachers are highly reflective. They moderate planning, learning, teaching and assessment informally through regular collegiate working. Teachers engage well in moderation activities with colleagues in their cluster school, and more widely with the associated schools group. For example, they review standards of children's writing and approaches to assessing listening and talking. This helps to ensure teachers' professional judgements of children's attainment are accurate and robust.

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

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good. Most children across the school achieve expected levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. A few children work beyond expected levels in literacy and numeracy.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards their individual targets in learning.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Across the school, most children make good progress in all aspects of literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Most children across the school talk confidently and animatedly about recent learning, sharing facts and answering questions. Most children at early level listen well to the ideas of others. They follow and give instructions to each other accurately, for example, during a game. They engage well together during play experiences, sharing their ideas and feelings. A few younger children need support to use appropriate body language when listening. This includes looking at the person speaking and waiting for their turn to speak. Most children at first and second levels listen and respond appropriately to others in a respectful way. For example, they demonstrate good listening skills such as nodding or agreeing, asking and answering questions. They need more regular opportunities to take notes and use these for different purposes.

Reading

- At early level, most children use their increasing knowledge of sounds and words to read a simple text well. They share their favourite part of a known story and sequence events in a story accurately. They need more practice to consolidate using their reading skills to help read trickier words. Most children at first and second levels read well with fluency and expression, as appropriate to their age and stage. They explain their preferences for texts and authors with evidence. Most children answer literal, inferential and evaluative questions about texts with confidence. They need support to develop further their understanding of the purpose of a text and the features of language in non-fiction books.

Writing

- At early level, most children are confident to have a go at writing words and sentences using their knowledge of sounds and letters. They enjoy regular opportunities to draw and write through play and class activities. For example, they describe planets they have designed and share stories they have written. They continue to develop skills in handwriting and leaving spaces between each word as they write. Most children at first and second levels write

independently, punctuating most sentences accurately appropriate to their age and stage. They use capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks successfully. Children have developed secure skills in writing persuasively using appropriate language style and format. Children at first and second levels should continue to create texts regularly for a range of purposes and audiences. They would benefit from selecting appropriate genre, form, structure and style as they write. This will support them to develop a stronger understanding of different genres of writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Across the school, most children make good progress in all aspects of numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children are confident in counting on and back within 20. They count accurately in twos and 10s. Most children calculate doubles within 10 and add and subtract within 20 accurately. They need support to revisit analogue times and daily routines. Most children at first level round whole numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They use this skill routinely to estimate and check the reasonableness of a solution. They tell the time correctly using half past, quarter past and quarter to, using analogue and digital 12 hour clocks. They are less confident recording amounts of money accurately in different ways using the correct notation. Children at first level need support to revisit solving subtraction problems with three-digit whole numbers. Most children at second level round whole numbers to the nearest 1,000, 10,000 and 100,000. Children at second level need to develop further their ability to calculate the area of squares, rectangles and right-angled triangles.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children correctly name a range of two-dimensional (2D) shapes. They explain how many sides and corners a shape has and a few are confident in identifying lines of symmetry within shapes. Most children at early level use directional language accurately to follow directions. Most children at first level name, identify and classify a range of simple 2D shapes and recognise these shapes in different orientations and sizes. They are not yet confident doing this for three-dimensional (3D) objects. At second level, most children describe, plot and record the location of a point, using coordinate notation. They are less confident describing the properties of a circle.

Information handling

- At early level, most children ably answer questions from a simple graph about the most and least popular pets. They gather information using tally marks and share information in picture charts and Carroll diagrams. At first and second levels, most children extract key information from a variety of data sets including charts, bar graphs and tables. At second level, children need help to develop their use of the language of probability accurately to describe the likelihood of simple events occurring, for example equal chance and 50-50. Children at first and second levels should continue to be supported to develop skills in displaying data appropriately making effective use of technology.

Attainment over time

- Due to the small numbers of children at each stage, attainment data over time can be variable. Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and numeracy over time. The headteacher has introduced a robust tracking system to monitor and track the progress of individuals, cohorts and groups of children. Staff use national Benchmarks and a range of literacy and numeracy assessment information effectively to evidence children's attainment. As a result, teachers track accurately individual children's progress in literacy and numeracy. Staff use data well to identify individuals and groups for targeted interventions, including

those with barriers to learning. Staff demonstrate clearly the individual progress made by children who benefit from interventions.

- The headteacher tracks carefully the attendance of all children in line with the school's attendance policy. Where there is a concern around falling attendance, the headteacher is proactive in working with parents to improve this. In session 2024–25, overall attendance was 94.1%, which is above the national average. This has been an improving trend for the last three years. A minority of children have attendance below 90% due to extended holidays or family challenges. At the time of the inspection, there were no children experiencing part-time education.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's achievements in and out of school are shared and celebrated during assemblies, through digital platforms and school newsletters. Staff have begun to track children's achievements in and out of school. This has the potential to help them to ensure no child is at risk of missing out. Staff collaborate well with partners such as Active Schools coordinators and music specialists to plan varied experiences for children. This helps children achieve success and develop in confidence. Older children participate in a variety of local sporting competitions and festivals where they demonstrate successfully their sportsmanship and teamworking skills. Children speak proudly of their successes in these areas. At all stages, children develop their leadership skills well through initiatives such as playground and digital leaders, buddies and pupil council. These opportunities help children to be responsible and contribute well to the life of their school.
- Children would benefit from identifying the skills they are developing through their achievements and how they can apply them to other areas of learning. Staff should now consider how to introduce and develop the language of skills to children's learning. They should track and monitor these skills, making links to the Curriculum for Excellence four capacities and skills for learning, life and work. This will enable the headteacher and staff to target support and experiences more effectively.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know children and families very well. They understand the socio-economic context of their rural community. Staff are committed to ensuring there is no cost to the school day. This includes providing school uniform and snacks as required. The Parent Council works effectively in partnership with school staff and fundraises regularly for the school. This helps to offset the cost of school trips, ensuring all children benefit from the valuable social experiences offered.
- The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) to employ additional staff who provide targeted supports in literacy and numeracy. Staff monitor and review these interventions regularly to ensure they meet the needs of children. Staff evidence well the positive impact of these interventions. The school has successfully closed gaps in learning for a few children as a result. The headteacher has identified the need to strengthen how staff measure and evaluate the impact of PEF on closing the attainment gap. This evidence should support staff to select the most effective interventions to accelerate more children's progress in learning.

Other relevant evidence

- All children experience two hours of high-quality physical education each week.
- Children have access to a very attractive and newly refreshed school library. Teachers developed class reading corners with relevant and interesting selections of texts to read. This is helping to support children's enthusiasm for and enjoyment of reading.
- Children across the school learn French progressively in line with the Scottish Government's 1+2 modern language guidance. Older children learn Scots as an additional language.
- Children experience their entitlement to religious and moral education. Children learn about Christianity and world faiths.
- The headteacher provides highly effective leadership for learning across the school. Working very well with the staff team, she is helping to ensure all children experience learning and teaching which is meeting their needs and provides appropriate challenge and support.

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.