

Summarised inspection findings

Castletown Primary School

The Highland Council

27 August 2024

Key contextual information

Castletown Primary School is situated in the rural village of Castletown just outside Thurso in Highland Council. The headteacher has been in post for ten years. She is also the head of Castletown nursery class and another school and nursery within the local authority. There is one principal teacher who is class committed for four days per week. In addition, there is a total of 3.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers. There is also one additional support for learning teacher and a Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) teacher who visit the school for one day per week. Three additional support needs pupil support assistants work a total of 64 hours per week.

The current school roll is 81 children working across four composite classes. All children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones 1 to 7. Twenty-eight percent of children require additional support with their learning.

Castletown Primary School nursery class was inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the past 18 months, therefore, the local authority and headteacher had the option to include the nursery class as part of this inspection. We have agreed with the local authority and school that the nursery class is not part of this inspection. The findings set out below are for the primary school stages.

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

- All staff provide children with a very happy and secure learning environment. Staff encourage and support children very well to follow the school vision of 'Encouraging each other to be the best we can be'. They have high expectations for all children. The headteacher sought the views of all stakeholders in school session 2021-2022 to update the school values. This is ensuring that they are relevant and meaningful to the school community. Children and all staff demonstrate the school values very well.
- All staff put children firmly at the centre of their work and have a clear understanding of social justice. They are developing children's understanding of their rights as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This work is at an early stage and children are not yet familiar with their rights and how they impact on their lives. Staff and children in the rights respecting school's group have developed an effective action plan to take this forward.
- All children demonstrate their leadership skills well when organising whole school events, community activities and fundraising. A minority of children have useful opportunities to develop their leadership skills through pupil voice groups. The student council gather children's views from suggestion boxes and share these with others during assemblies. Staff need to

increase the number of pupil voice groups across the school. This will provide all children with planned opportunities to shape and influence the work of the school.

- The headteacher and all staff have a strong understanding of the socio-economic context of the local community. They are well respected by parents and children. The headteacher builds effective community partnerships which support children and their families well. Parents and members of the local community give their time willingly to improve children's experiences which is sustaining the school vision.
- The headteacher and all staff are committed to change and improvement through informal dialogue and more focused self-evaluation activities. They used How Good is our School? (4th Edition) to review the curriculum. These activities enable all staff to be involved in identifying the school's strengths and areas requiring improvement. The headteacher and staff also use attainment data increasingly well as a driver for school improvement planning to ensure they focus on outcomes for children. It would be beneficial for the headteacher and staff to undertake self-evaluation activities more systematically. This will enable them to focus on specific aspects of the school's work.
- The headteacher shares school improvement plans widely with parents on the school website, in school displays and at Parent Council meetings. She consults with parents on the proposed use of PEF. The headteacher seeks parents' views on the impact of school improvement priorities through questionnaires. This is helping all members of the school community to have a clear understanding of the need and rationale behind change.
- All staff are committed to change and improvement. They work together very well as a highly effective and well-established team. This is an important strength of the school. They utilise each other's areas of expertise to lead effectively on school improvement. Staff also lead on a range of clubs and children's committees which provide children with meaningful opportunities for wider achievement. The headteacher protects time for teachers' professional development in a planned calendar of collegiate activities. Staff undertake professional learning willingly and are confident in applying their learning to implement change. For example, last session staff implemented successful approaches to the teaching of fiction writing. Building on this, staff completed further training this session on developing non-fiction writing. This training is leading to improvements in children's learning experiences and is impacting positively on children's skills in writing non-fiction texts.
- This session, the headteacher and staff agreed to reduce the number of school improvement priorities to give them time to develop and embed planned actions more fully. School improvement priorities for this session include implementing new approaches to develop children's literacy skills and the health and wellbeing curriculum. This work is improving children's literacy skills. The headteacher identifies that school improvement planning actions need to have more appropriate timescales so that they are fully implemented.
- The headteacher has a comprehensive calendar of activities to quality assure learning, teaching and assessment. The headteacher has carried out observations of learning and teaching. This session, a few of these planned quality assurance activities have not taken place for a range of reasons. The headteacher should protect time to undertake quality assurance activities to gather a robust breadth of evidence about the quality of learning, teaching and assessment.
- Staff take effective account of children's learning needs and barriers to learning, including poverty related factors. The headteacher uses data strategically to inform the use of PEF. She

has a clear PEF plan outlining the literacy and numeracy interventions for identified children. There is evidence that these interventions are improving children's literacy skills.

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 ethos and culture of the school reflects the commitment of staff and children to nurturing positive and kind relationships. Teachers provide children with challenging and interactive experiences in most lessons. As a result, almost all children engage well with their learning. They listen attentively to their teachers during lessons and work collaboratively with each other on tasks and activities.
- All children are very well-behaved. They are mannerly to visitors in the school, greeting them warmly. Children take responsibility for their own and others' behaviour. For example, children identified the need to review the rules for playing football in the playground to keep everyone safe and ensure fair play. They worked collaboratively with other children and school staff to review and update the expectations around football.
- Children are motivated and responsible learners with frequent opportunities to experience success through the school's awards system. They contribute effectively to the life of the school in House Teams, and groups such as litter picking, the student council, the junior road safety officers and rights respecting schools group. Children experience regular success within their wider community through for example, the Rotary Club Quiz. These opportunities for wider achievement are building children's skills and helping them to be confident individuals.
- Children across the school use software programmes regularly for literacy and numeracy activities. This is engaging children in their learning and helping them to work independently. Older children use a digital learning platform successfully to collaborate and share their learning from home with their peers. This promotes an effective culture of learning and supports children's communication between home and school very well.
- Children have worthwhile opportunities to learn outdoors. For example, children in P6/7 demonstrate their gardening skills very well through propagating plants from seeds and cuttings. They sell their plants in a sale to raise funds for a charity. Partners provide worthwhile outdoor activities which develop well children's understanding of nature and sustainability. Children are developing an understanding of conservation in the 'Puddles to Ponds' project delivered by the Countryside Rangers. Staff recognise that a next step is to plan children's outdoor learning experiences progressively.
- Staff are at the early stages of implementing play-based learning. They have participated in worthwhile training using national guidance to develop their skills and knowledge. Staff identify that a key area for development is to review the learning environment to provide children with opportunities to explore and be curious. Staff would benefit from looking outwards to other establishments to help develop their approaches to play-based learning.

- Teachers underpin their approaches to children's learning with the school's vision of 'Encouraging each other to be all you can be'. Teachers provide children with welcoming and very calm classroom environments. Children engage very well in their learning and are motivated participants who interact well with their peers and class teachers. In almost all lessons, teachers outline the purpose of learning clearly and children know how to demonstrate success. As a result, children concentrate well on tasks and activities. It would be helpful for children to co-create steps to success with their teachers to further enhance their understanding of the skills they are learning. In almost all lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. In most lessons, teachers use questioning skilfully to promote children's higher order thinking skills.
- In almost all lessons, teachers observe children closely to make well-timed interventions. They adapt tasks and activities appropriately to support most children's needs well. Teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to children and written feedback in jotters. Teachers should ensure that written feedback is linked clearly to planned learning. Children require more opportunities to self- and peer-assess their work. This will help children to know where they have been successful and what they need to improve upon.
- Teachers follow the school's yearly assessment calendar to implement a range of diagnostic and summative assessments. They use a variety of valid and reliable assessment approaches. For example, teachers plan high-quality assessments that enable children to demonstrate their skills and knowledge across several curricular areas. Teachers store samples of children's learning and assessments in children's learning profiles. This helps staff and children to see the progress children make over time. As a next step, teachers should develop a cohesive assessment policy outlining clearly the nature and purpose of all assessment activities.
- Teachers engage in informal moderation activities with colleagues in school regularly and have participated in helpful moderation training with cluster colleagues. They are keen to engage in more moderation with colleagues from cluster schools. Teachers would benefit from further opportunities to interact with the national Benchmarks. This will deepen their understanding of children's progress through Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.
- Teachers use progressive learning pathways for health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. They record the coverage of the experiences and outcome of CfE across all other curriculum areas. Teachers now need to develop learning pathways that will help to ensure that children's knowledge and skills develop progressively in all areas of the curriculum. Children have a few meaningful opportunities for choice in learning that links different areas of the curriculum. Teachers should consider how further opportunities could be afforded to children to influence and lead their learning.
- The headteacher meets with teachers three times a year to discuss children's progress and attainment. Teachers complete a whole school tracker outlining if children are on target to achieve expected levels, not on target or just below target. They identify children who would benefit from additional support with their learning, including those children impacted by factors relating to poverty. Teachers plan appropriate interventions making effective use of attainment data. Pupil support assistants deliver valuable and well-timed one-to-one or small group interventions effectively to address children's needs. These approaches are raising attainment for identified children.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use guidance from Highland Council for health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy to plan progressive learning for children. They identify the need to develop progression pathways to support the planning and delivery of learning across all other curricular areas. This will help children to build upon what they already know. It would be helpful for staff to develop approaches to planning learning through themes such as creativity and enterprise.
- Children have useful opportunities to develop their skills for learning life and work through partnership working. For example, they recently enjoyed a talk from Dounreay about robots. Children also participated in an animation workshop which has developed their digital technology skills well. Children need more opportunities to lead their learning in ways that reflect the unique local context and the rich culture and history of Caithness.
- Teachers deliver French progressively as part of the school's 1+2 approach to modern languages. Younger children have had opportunities to learn British Sign Language. Children from P5 to P7 have recently started to learn Scots.
- The school's shared digital online classroom supports children very well to collaborate with each other and their teachers. This is supporting transitions particularly well for children moving onto Thurso High School.
- All children receive their entitlement of two hours each week of high-quality physical education. Children receive their entitlement to religious and moral education. Children from P5 onwards receive musical tuition in woodwind, string and the chanter which is helping them to read music and improving their performance skills. Children's artwork is of a high quality and is displayed attractively throughout the school.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Almost all parents are happy with the work of the school. They speak highly of the headteacher and of all staff. Most parents would recommend the school to others. Parents appreciate the regular communication they receive in a weekly email from the headteacher.
- The school has an established and highly active Parent Council. They work well with the wider parent body, encouraging them to be involved with the Parent Council. Parents are proactive in fundraising which helps children to access a wide range of interesting trips and excursions. They support the school well with applications for funding to improve the school environment and are currently applying for funding to develop a school outdoor area. Parents volunteer their skills in school. For example, parents lead children in a club which is developing children's cycling skills and understanding of safe cycling. These activities widen and enhance children's learning experiences.
- Most parents understand how their child's attainment is assessed. They particularly enjoy reviewing children's learning profiles which provide them with samples of children's work and their assessments. This helps parents to know how their child is progressing and how to support them at home. A minority of parents would like more opportunities to learn alongside their child.

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 place a high importance on improving the health and wellbeing of children and their families. Staff keep children firmly at the centre of their work to provide a highly inclusive and caring learning environment. Children and staff reflect regularly on the school values, demonstrating them well. Almost all children feel that school helps them to be safe and most know they have someone to talk to if they feel upset or worried. Almost all parents are comfortable approaching staff with a concern or problem.
- Across the school, almost all children are kind, caring and respectful toward each other and adults. There are very positive relationships between children and between children and staff. Older children relish in their roles as buddies to support younger children in their learning and in the playground. They demonstrate responsibility and citizenship well when undertaking these roles.
- Staff support children effectively to understand their emotions. Teachers encourage children to complete emotional check-ins during the day. This is helping children to talk about and share their feelings. Children complete wellbeing surveys which provide the headteacher with useful information about children's wellbeing. She uses the results from these surveys successfully to identify children who may require specific support. Staff provide children with effective one-to-one interventions or follow up discussions. As a result, children experience positive wellbeing. The headteacher is currently adapting school surveys with local authority guidelines to develop this work further.
- Across the school, most children have a firm understanding of the factors that contribute to positive wellbeing. A minority of children require more support in using the language of the wellbeing indicators. Staff have started to develop children's understanding of their rights. Senior leaders and teachers should now, as planned, develop children's awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This will help children to be clear about their rights and how they impact on their daily lives.
- Last session, staff made changes to the health and wellbeing curriculum. Staff have agreed a shared overview for planning the health and wellbeing curriculum which covers a two-year period. Teachers take effective account of multi-stage classes within the school. They support children well to learn progressively across all aspects of physical, mental, social and emotional health. Staff have also developed the relationships and sexual health programme which is helping them to have a clear and consistent approach. Almost all children believe that the school is helping them to lead a healthy lifestyle. They talk confidently about their learning through the health and wellbeing curriculum. Staff now need to work together to develop

approaches to tracking and assessing children's knowledge and understanding of the health and wellbeing curriculum more fully.

- Staff provide children with worthwhile opportunities to relax and learn new skills during break and lunchtimes. For example, children demonstrate their knitting skills successfully in a lunchtime club. Children also enjoy an arts and crafts club at playtime and lunchtime. This allows them to demonstrate their creative skills and helps those who would prefer a quiet rest during their breaks to feel secure and confident. Staff also provide children with opportunities to develop their sporting skills in the football club. Children are looking forward to participation in the Thurso Football Festival. They are also very proud of their success in the Caithness Netball Competition. Children have opportunities to get regular exercise. They experience two-hours of high-quality physical education each week. Older children learn a range of new sports on their residential trip such as canoeing. This builds their confidence and independence.
- All staff have a clear understanding of their statutory duties and responsibilities for keeping children safe and supporting their wellbeing. They engage in annual updates to the mandatory child protection training. The headteacher provides all adults with key and important information for working with children who have specific needs whilst ensuring discretion. This helps staff to meet children's wellbeing needs effectively.
- Staff support children who require additional help with their learning well. They access training which helps them to understand and meet children's needs effectively. The headteacher and staff discuss children's learning closely during tracking meeting. They identify children who require additional support and develop well-considered plans with specific targets and measurable outcomes. The headteacher and staff review children's progress towards their targets regularly. Pupil support assistants would welcome more opportunities to share their views about children's progress. Where required, the headteacher shares children's plans with parents and children to gather their views. This session, staff have started to create a long-term profile of needs and interventions for children who require additional support with their learning. As this work develops, this will help staff to have a clear overview of children's literacy attainment, learning needs and the strategies that support them successfully over time.
- Partnership working supports children requiring additional support well. These partners include healthcare specialists, counselling specialists and other agencies. Additional support for learning staff collaborate effectively with teachers and pupil support staff by providing helpful guidance about approaches to meeting children's needs. As a result, most children who require additional support for learning make good progress in relation to specific targets.
- The headteacher signposts families to agencies who support their health and wellbeing. For example, agencies which provide information about employability, welfare advice, foodbanks and access to digital technology. This is helping parents and families to know where to access support if they need it and promoting a culture of inclusion and equity.
- The headteacher considers carefully the wellbeing needs of children who are affected by socio-economic factors. She uses PEF to enhance staffing and deliver small group or individual interventions to improve children's wellbeing and readiness to learn. This is helping children to overcome barriers to learning and achieve success.
- Staff and children are keen to learn about and celebrate the differences in others. Children demonstrate their understanding of other faiths and beliefs through the Religious and Moral Education programme. The local minister attends school assemblies once a fortnight to support children's religious observance. The headteacher has purchased a wide range of

books about different cultures and the world of work. This is improving children's understanding of different jobs and people. Almost all children feel that school staff help them to understand and respect other people. Children would benefit from further opportunities to develop their understanding of different people including those with protected characteristics.

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

- There is a small number of children at each stage within the school. This can impact significantly on CfE percentage levels of attainment.
- Attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. Overall, most children achieve national expectations in listening and talking. The majority of children at early level and most at first level, achieve national expectations in reading, writing and numeracy. At second level, most children achieve national expectations in reading and writing. Almost all children at second level achieve national expectations in numeracy.
- Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Children make good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and English. Children apply their literacy skills well across the curriculum.

Listening and talking

- At early level, the majority of children engage well when listening to information and songs. They can share their likes and dislikes about favourite stories confidently. At first level, most children communicate clearly and audibly taking turns to contribute appropriately during discussions. A few children would benefit from further opportunities to consolidate this skill. At second level, most children explain clearly why they prefer certain genres of texts or authors. They are highly articulate and would benefit from further opportunities to take part in debates.

Reading

- Children across the school are very enthusiastic readers. They access books from the well-stocked school library which are matched carefully to children's levels of reading.
- At early level, the majority of children sound out single sounds in words. They are beginning to recognise the different sounds vowels make in words. At first level, most children read aloud fluently and with expression, using a wide range of punctuation. At second level, most children apply skimming and scanning strategies successfully to locate and gather key information from texts. Children identify successfully the key features of non-fiction texts such as index, glossary and contents.

Writing

- Over the last few years, staff have introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing and spelling which are raising children's levels of attainment.
- At early level, the majority of children use their knowledge of letter sounds to spell familiar words accurately. Children need more opportunities to revise letter formation and size. At first level, most children use their knowledge of letter sounds and spelling strategies to spell commonly used words correctly. They use a range of conjunctions to write longer sentences with interesting openers. At second level, most children use a wide range of vocabulary within their writing. They write successfully across a range of genres, including poetry.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children make good progress from prior levels of attainment in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, the majority of children count on and back to 50 or more successfully and can identify missing numbers. They add and subtract confidently within 10. Children need further support in telling the time. At first level, most children are confident in addition, subtraction, division and multiplication problems with 3-digit whole numbers. Almost all children at second level have a very strong understanding of number processes. They complete number calculations and multi-step problems quickly and accurately. They read scales correctly on different instruments of measure. For example, children use anemometer to measure wind speed. They need further opportunities to understand concepts of budgeting using money.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, the majority of children identify successfully simple two-dimensional shapes in a picture. They use positional language accurately. At first level, most children identify a right angle but are less confident about the number of degrees in a right angle. At first and second level, almost all children accurately name and describe the properties of a range of three-dimensional objects (3D). At second level children need to improve their knowledge in identifying the nets of 3D shapes.

Information handling

- At early level, the majority of children can identify the most popular item on a bar graph. At first level, most children know how to gather information in a survey and display it on a bar graph or pictogram. At second level, almost all children gather, display and interpret data successfully using a range of graphs and charts. They are developing advanced skills in using terms such as mean, median and mode to analyse data within a range.

Attainment over time

- Overall, most children make strong progress from prior levels of attainment over time. Their attainment increases as they move through the school.
- The headteacher and staff track children's attainment in literacy and numeracy carefully. This includes data about specific groups and cohorts. They use data very effectively to implement strategies to raise attainment. Staff should now track children's progress and attainment over all curriculum areas including the health and wellbeing curriculum.
- Teachers and the headteacher use valid and reliable information from a range of assessments to inform their professional judgements about children's attainment. Staff should make more

use of the national Benchmarks to support their understanding of children's progress through CfE levels.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's achievements are shared and celebrated widely at Together Time assemblies and on displays in the school. Children decide on the nature of these achievements, choosing things that are important to them. This builds children's confidence and self-awareness well.
- Children demonstrate their musical and performance skills in events and competitions such as the Caithness Music Festival. Children demonstrate their sporting skills well by enjoying a range of sports clubs and competitions. They record their sporting achievements in their learning profiles which encourages them to try new sports and do their best.
- Children have a strong understanding of the needs of others through their charitable fundraising activities, for example in the Blythwood Shoebox Appeal. This is supporting them to be responsible citizens. Children contribute effectively to the local community. For example, P5/6 recently organised a ceilidh where they invited parents, other children and members of the local community.
- Class teachers keep a record of children's achievements inside and outside of school and children also record their achievements in their learning profiles. The headteacher and teachers track children's achievements to ensure no child is at risk of missing out.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher tracks children's attendance carefully. She takes prompt action to address attendance issues through discussions with families following local authority guidelines. Attendance levels are in line with the national average.
- The headteacher uses PEF to provide targeted support for children in literacy and, health and wellbeing. Teachers identify children's needs using a range of diagnostic assessments and plan interventions carefully. They review these on an ongoing basis. Children make good progress towards their identified targets. Teachers' targeted interventions and approaches to teaching spelling are raising attainment and closing identified gaps. The headteacher needs to ensure that there is robust evidence to demonstrate that PEF is accelerating progress for all identified children.

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.