

Summarised inspection findings

Dunbeath Primary School

The Highland Council

10 March 2026

Key contextual information

Dunbeath Primary School is a small, rural school situated in Dunbeath in the Highlands. The school serves the local communities of Dunbeath and Berridale in the Caithness area. Currently there are 25 children across two multi-composite classes. The school also has an early learning and childcare service. The headteacher is established in the community and has a shared headship with another local school. She is supported by an acting principal teacher who provides leadership to Dunbeath Early Learning and Childcare Service. The acting principal teacher also has teaching and leadership commitments in the partner school. A few children across the school have an identified support need. All pupils live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 3 and 4.

1.3 Leadership of change	satisfactory
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	

- Across the school there is a calm, positive and welcoming ethos. The leadership team and staff have a strong understanding of their local context. Last session, the leadership team worked effectively with children, staff and parents to review and develop a new vision, values and aim. Children, parents and staff were fully involved in shaping the school values. The values of kindness, confidence and adventure are easily understood by children at all stages. Children talk positively about their new values and understand how these values help them in their learning. Children and staff embody the value of kindness. Older children work with younger children at assemblies to ensure all children have a strong understanding of what kindness looks like. Older children discuss why it is important to develop their confidence. The value of adventure reflects very well the ambition of staff and children to use their local environment more effectively to enhance children's experiences and learning. The headteacher and staff have identified the need to review and refresh the school's curriculum rationale to reflect the new school values. This important work should help all staff plan children's learning, taking into account the unique features of the school, its location and context. This work should be developed in consultation with staff, children, parents and partners within the school community and be underpinned by the recently refreshed vision, values and aim.
- The leadership team have developed a clear annual calendar of quality assurance activities. These include learning visits, planning moderation and peer moderation. The leadership team monitor effectively the quality of children's work and track well children's progress and attainment. These activities are helping staff to evaluate more accurately the quality of learning and teaching across the school. Teachers have developed a guide which identifies a number of approaches that are required to ensure high-quality learning for children. They used pupil views to consider what learning will enthuse children. This approach is helping to support and share expertise across the school. Together staff should develop the learning and

teaching guide further to provide examples of what high-quality learning looks like for children at different stages. This should support staff to embed high-quality approaches in their practice and develop more consistency across the team. A clear and accessible learning and teaching guide should also provide valuable guidance for any new staff in the future.

- The leadership team work regularly with teachers to review the school's progress using *How good is our school?* 4th edition. This is helping ensure all staff understand what is working well and why areas for improvement are identified. Together, they develop improvement plans that aim to support improved outcomes for children. Improvement plans outline clearly the actions, timeframes and intended outcomes for staff and children. Staff use data well to identify improvement priorities correctly. They rightly identified the need to improve the quality of children's writing. Together, teachers have engaged with meaningful professional learning to develop a consistent approach to the teaching of writing. In a short space of time, there are early signs that children's tools for writing and sentence content have improved. The headteacher and teachers work closely together to analyse children's progress. They plan supports and interventions to help a few children to close gaps in learning.
- Teachers are keen to take increased responsibility for improving their practice and the headteacher is highly supportive of their work. Teachers undertake professional learning and small tests of change to develop new approaches to support children's learning. Teachers now use a common language to help children reflect on the skills they are using and developing. Children now talk more articulately about the skills they use in their daily learning. Teachers are exploring new approaches to plan and track children's learning. They draw upon local and national guidance including well-considered programmes of work. Together, they should streamline planning and tracking documentation. They should ensure it remains manageable and provides clear and accurate information to show the progress children are making.
- Teachers and senior leaders meet termly to discuss children's progress. These meetings include a focus on children not on track and the interventions being used to address this. Teachers share that regular professional dialogue has improved their understanding of national standards. These activities include attainment meetings, moderation opportunities with colleagues across the associated school group and engagement with national Benchmarks.
- The headteacher consults parents and children on the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) each session. Staff make use of PEF to resource targeted support. This approach is improving children's confidence, self-regulation skills and fluency when reading aloud. Staff should now ensure clear measures are in place to enable staff to evaluate more effectively the impact of interventions. This should help them make informed decisions about approaches that should be embedded into children's learning experiences.
- Staff are at the early stages of involving all children in making decisions through pupil leadership groups. These include the eco committee and rainbow rights group. Children have further leadership opportunities through organising whole school events and through their school houses. The majority of children feel their views are listened to. However, a minority of children are not always clear on how their views shape the work of the school and lead to improvements. As planned, staff should support children to evaluate more clearly the impact of their leadership opportunities and recognise the skills they are developing.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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

- Staff provide an inclusive and caring environment. Children are polite, well-mannered and happy. They experience positive relationships with staff who know them well. Families feel welcome in the school and regard it as an important part of the local community. Staff work together effectively to ensure children experience a positive ethos with a focus on children's rights. The school's recently revised values of kindness, confidence and adventure underpin increasingly the work of the school. Staff and children model the school values well in their daily interactions. This supports most children to feel that they are treated with respect and sets a supportive climate for learning across the school.
- Staff work together effectively to ensure that strong and supportive relationships underpin the school's approach to behaviour. Increasingly, staff use positive approaches to support children's emotional wellbeing. As a result, most children across the school display consistent and high standards of behaviour.
- Children are keen, eager and have a positive attitude towards their learning. Most are engaged and motivated participants in learning. In most lessons, teachers provide regular opportunities for children to work together in pairs and groups. Most children work well together and interact positively with each other when completing tasks. This positive attitude to learning is more evident when activities are stimulating, well-paced and matched to the needs and interests of individuals. Staff should continue to provide children with increased opportunities to take greater responsibility for leading their own learning.
- Staff have worked together effectively to undertake professional learning focusing on improving the quality and consistency of learning and teaching. This is beginning to support the staff team to develop a shared understanding of high-quality learning and teaching. In most lessons, teachers provide clear instructions, share the purpose of learning and help children understand what they need to do to be successful. Children are now ready to be more involved in co-creating measures of success to help them have a deeper understanding of their progress and identify next steps. Teachers use questioning effectively to check for children's understanding. In a few examples, teachers use open-ended questions to encourage children to think and give reasons for their answers. Teachers should develop questioning techniques further to deepen and enhance children's learning and higher-order thinking skills.
- Staff working with the youngest children use play to support children's learning. Young children are enthusiastic when given opportunities to learn through play. As teachers continue to

develop this approach, they should work in partnership with colleagues within the nursery and engage with national practice guidance. This should support children to experience progressive learning across the early level with developmentally appropriate activities that provide the right level of challenge.

- Staff use digital technology effectively, such as the interactive whiteboard, to support their teaching. Children independently access digital devices regularly to support and enhance learning. They play games to consolidate their learning and research and present information using software. Children who require additional support would benefit from a greater use of assistive technology to support them with their learning.
- In most lessons, teachers use formative assessment strategies to assess children's understanding. They provide verbal and written feedback to support children to understand how successful they have been. Staff should develop further the consistency of high-quality written feedback, particularly for older children. This should better support children's understanding of what they are doing well and their next steps in learning.
- Staff have developed a useful assessment calendar and use effectively a range of assessments to assess children's progress and identify next steps in learning. Teachers are beginning to devise high-quality assessments but should now make them more integral to curriculum planning. The headteacher and teachers use assessment effectively to support professional judgements on children's progress and levels of achievement. They use this data well to identify gaps in progress and plan future learning and support. Teachers should continue to use information from assessment to increase further children's pace of learning.
- Teachers plan learning over different timescales. They use a range of learning pathways, including those developed by the local authority, to inform this planning. Teachers use children's interests very well to develop engaging contexts for learning. Teachers should develop a more streamlined and consistent approach to medium- and long- term planning. This should support them to plan more effectively for learning across the curriculum that offers suitable pace and challenge. In addition, teachers should ensure they moderate planning, learning and teaching to inform their work in this area.
- The headteacher meets with staff termly to discuss children's progress and attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They identify children who require additional support with their learning. Identified children benefit from well-planned interventions which help them to make progress with their learning. Teachers have engaged enthusiastically in moderation activity across their associated school group, most recently in writing. This has focused mainly on moderating the outcome of children's writing against national Benchmarks. This is helping them understand more clearly national expectations and is supporting their professional judgements. Teachers are now in a strong position to broaden the reach of moderation to other curricular areas to help them identify accurately children's progress across the curriculum.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers have worked well together to ensure they now use progressive planning pathways for all curricular areas. This includes a blend of local authority and other planners. Teachers plan appropriate learning using experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). They use very effectively children's interests to develop contexts that ensure children do not repeat topics in a multi-composite class. To support their planning, teachers refer to national Benchmarks at the planning stage. This helps them plan individualised learning for children working at different levels while using the same context.
- Children at all stages receive two hours of physical education each week. In addition, older children participate in a ten-week block of swimming annually. Teachers should support children to understand the skills they are developing as part of these lessons. The headteacher should continue to monitor these experiences as part of her quality assurance programme to ensure it is consistently high-quality.
- Staff deliver the national 1 + 2 language policy effectively. Children in all classes learn French. In addition, younger children learn Gaelic and older children learn British Sign Language in a planned, progressive way.
- All children follow a programme of religious and moral education. Most children engage well in developing their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world religions alongside developing their own beliefs and values. Partners from the local church support staff to deliver religious education and observance. These partners support the delivery of assemblies and visit classes. This collaborative approach helps children understand how their learning impacts practically in the local community.
- Children have access to a wide range of books in their class and school libraries. They also benefit from monthly visits from a library van. This is supporting well children's reading for enjoyment.
- Children experience opportunities to learn successfully outdoors, both within and beyond the school grounds. They grow and sell plants through a successful intergenerational project. As a next step, staff should develop a pathway for outdoor learning to ensure children's experiences are well-planned, progressive and coherent. This should ensure children have increased opportunities to learn outdoors.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Most parents feel that staff know their child as an individual and that their child is looked after well at school. Parents value the communication from staff to help them understand their child's experiences and progress. Staff communicate effectively with parents using an online application, emails and through regular updates.
- Parents are supportive of the school and interested in their child's learning and progress. A minority of parents would like more regular opportunities to learn with their child during parental events. This should help them have a better understanding of how they could support their child's learning outwith school.
- The Parent Council impacts positively on the wider life of the school. This includes organising events and helping to raise funds to support the work of the school. All children benefit from experiences, such as trips and events, being funded so that cost is not a barrier. The Parent Council welcome opportunities to share their views on school improvement and understands how the use of PEF supports children's wellbeing and progress. A few parents would like clearer and more prompt action when bringing suggestions to the school. Staff should now share more explicitly the impact parental engagement has on changes and improvements to the school. This should help parents understand more clearly how their voice and involvement impact positively on school improvement.

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

satisfactory

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- All staff have a very strong understanding of the context of the school. They foster and sustain highly positive relationships with children and their families. The strong partnership working across the staff team ensures children are valued, nurtured and included at school. Staff place a high value on the wellbeing of children, and most children feel safe and respected. Parents talk very positively about the school's warm and nurturing ethos and how well staff support their children. Relationships between staff, children and families are a strength of the school.
- Most children consistently engage positively in school and are supportive and helpful towards their peers. They are polite and friendly to visitors. Children have trusted adults in the school and the majority know who they can turn to for help if required. Older children have been trained as playground leaders and will begin to support younger children in the playground. Staff are skilled at providing support for children who need help to develop and sustain friendships.
- Staff support children well to understand and reflect on their feelings and emotions. They use a range of resources including the use of a wellbeing wheel. Staff analyse this information and provide well-considered and prompt support to children who may require it. This helps most children feel safe and secure at school. Staff support children effectively to understand the language of the wellbeing indicators as part of their new vision and values. Children talk about how they are responsible through their leadership roles and classroom jobs. Most children talk about keeping healthy through regular exercise. A minority of children are not able to articulate the ways the school supports them to be healthy. Staff should build upon the strong approach to children leading assemblies. They should help children share more widely the actions the school takes to support children to experience positive physical, mental and emotional health.
- Children take on leadership roles when organising and leading events and through delivering assemblies to their peers. Children develop well their communication, teamwork and, for older children, leadership skills through participation in these activities. Teachers have implemented a skills programme to support children to reflect more widely on the skills they develop through different experiences. Children as a result, are increasingly able to talk about themselves as learners. This approach, in partnership with regular opportunities for leadership, is supporting children to develop a meaningful understanding of skills for learning, life and work. Although there are many opportunities for children to share their views and learning throughout the school, the majority are not always clear how their views are used. Staff should now support

children to understand more clearly how their views influence changes across the school. The reintroduction of leadership groups could support this work.

- Staff have a strong understanding of their responsibilities and statutory duties related to wellbeing, equality, and inclusion. Together they regularly review and update the school's positive relationships policy, anti-bullying policy and child protection policy to reflect current national guidance. This supports all staff to address any concerns from children and parents in a consistent and effective way. The headteacher has improved systems and procedures to meet staff's statutory duties. They use best practice guidance on chronologies and medication to ensure information is tracked and stored appropriately.
- All staff support well children who may require additional support for their wellbeing or learning. Skilled support staff work closely with teachers to provide bespoke support to children who may require a targeted approach. A few identified children are improving their technical written skills and ability to sustain concentration on learning tasks through targeted approaches. The headteacher develops appropriate plans for children who have additional support needs. This includes, where appropriate, individual risk assessments to support staff to meet individual children's needs. Staff should continue to draw upon professional partners' expertise, including the peripatetic additional support for learning teacher, to ensure targets in child's plans are consistently clear and measurable. With the clearer approaches and systems for planning for and tracking children's support, staff are now in a stronger place to take increased responsibility for planning for children.
- Staff and children have a consistent focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child across the school. Staff place children's views and opinions at the centre of their practice. They ensure children's voices are heard and valued. Together staff and children have achieved the first stage of a national award for children's rights. They have developed a detailed action plan to identify how staff will help children develop a strong understanding of the rights of the child. As a result, the majority of children talk knowledgeably about the different rights children are entitled to. Recently children undertook a diversity environmental audit and have reviewed resources to ensure they reflect a wider range of experiences and cultures. Children share their learning of rights and multi-faith issues at assemblies and during class lessons to help everyone have a shared understanding of this work. As a result, children are developing well their skills and confidence to address discrimination and intolerance. Children now need to be supported further to develop their learning about diversity and being a global citizen in a progressive way across the curriculum.
- Staff link effectively with local nurseries and their local secondary school to ensure there are effective transitions for children. As a result, younger children settle well and are happy and confident at school. Parents speak highly of the support from staff to ensure their children experience smooth and positive transitions to secondary school.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

satisfactory

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- At the time of the inspection, the school roll comprised of small cohorts of children at each stage. Children's attainment and progress is expressed in overall statements, rather than for specific year groups or CfE levels. This is to ensure the identity of individuals is not disclosed.
- Overall, attainment in reading, listening and talking and numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. Currently children's attainment in writing is weak. However, children's progress has accelerated with early signs that children's writing across the school is improving. The headteacher and staff identified accurately this as a priority and have taken prompt and strong steps to improve children's attainment in writing at all levels. Most children with additional support needs make satisfactory progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children's progress in literacy and English is satisfactory.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, most children listen well to staff and each other in teacher-led activities and group tasks. Younger children express their ideas well and show their understanding by answering questions. Most older children engage in discussions about learning, sharing their opinions and answering questions. They are less skilled at actively listening to each other and appropriately responding and building on the views of others. Children now need to develop their skills in asking and answering questions. This should help them extend their learning and understanding with their peers in a range of contexts. In addition, all children would benefit from further opportunities to present to a variety of audiences.

Reading

- Most younger children use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read simple words. They use clues in a text to help predict what will happen next. Most children across the school show enthusiasm for reading. The majority read aloud with increasing fluency appropriate to their age and stage. Older children offer a personal preference for authors and the type of books they enjoy. They explain clearly how the author, cover or title influences their choice of books when reading for enjoyment. Children across the school should now develop greater expression when reading aloud. They could apply these skills when retelling familiar stories, for example, through role play and use of puppets.

Writing

- Younger children are developing their use of sounds and blends to attempt to write unfamiliar words. They write simple sentences with a capital letter and full stop. Older children write most sentences with capital letters and full stops included accurately. They use paragraphs to structure their work although this is not consistently applied. Although children have improved significantly their tools for writing, they need to apply these skills in different genres for meaningful purposes. They require further support to improve the layout and presentation of their written work across the curriculum.

Attainment in in numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children's progress in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory.

Number, money and measure

- Most younger children are confidently working with numbers up to 10 and a few beyond. They are developing their sense of size and amount. Children should continue to develop their understanding of counting on and back. As children progress through the school, they identify accurately the place value of digits within numbers to 1,000. They need to be supported to develop their ability to solve two-step problems confidently. Older children explain the link between a digit, its place and its value for whole numbers to 100,000 correctly. They round numbers to the nearest 1,000, 10,000 and 100,000. They multiply and divide whole numbers by multiples of 10, 100 and 1,000. They are less confident ordering, simplifying and comparing fractions and calculating area and perimeter of shapes.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children name two-dimensional (2D) shapes but are not confident in naming common three-dimensional (3D) objects. They use simple language to describe position, for example, in front and behind. Most older children recognise and name a wider range of 2D shapes accurately. They describe the properties of 3D objects using correct vocabulary, such as face, edge and vertex. Older children identify and discuss a range of angles with increasing confidence. They should now develop their knowledge of area, perimeter, circumference and diameter.

Information handling

- Younger children match and sort items well by colour, size, and shape. Most older children extract key information and answer questions correctly from a range of graphs and tables. All children need opportunities to practise applying data and analysis skills regularly in a wide range of real-life, rich contexts including through the use of digital technology.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher monitors the attendance of children across the school. Attendance over the last few years has been in line or above national averages. Staff know children and families well and work closely with them to support improved attendance when necessary. This includes sharing attendance information with individual families when absence is higher than expected. A few children have an absence of 10% or more but the headteacher takes prompt action to address any concerns. There are no children on a part-time timetable and there have been no exclusions in recent years.
- Due to smaller numbers of children at each stage, trends in overall attainment data over time do not provide an accurate overview. The headteacher and teachers therefore discuss

progress and attainment of every child individually during termly tracking discussions. The headteacher uses a range of tracking systems to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of children. As a next step, the headteacher should consider streamlining the systems used to gather and record attainment data. This should support teachers to extract and use data more effectively and evidence more clearly children's progress over time.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff recognise, share and celebrate children's achievements in school and outwith school. Children enjoy receiving recognition for their achievements through house points, achievement certificates, positive notes home, sharing through an online platform, assemblies, newsletters and wall displays. Children are proud of their achievements including national accreditation on their work on children's rights.
- Children gain confidence and achieve success within and outwith school through activities such as annual sporting events, the local music festival, an annual science festival and school performances. Older children have trained as sports leaders and are keen to develop further this role. All children have class roles and responsibilities. They play an active role within their school, for example, by deciding on the focus of school assemblies and organising and presenting these. This is supporting children to develop as effective contributors and responsible citizens. Children play an active role within their local community through their links to the local day centre. Children plan a range of events to raise money for national charities. They make clear links with their fundraising and are developing key skills in their role as global citizens in supporting good causes.
- The headteacher and staff track children's achievements and participation in and outwith school. As planned staff should now discuss and track the skills children are developing from their achievements and link these to skills for learning, life and work. This should help children to make clear links between their achievements, learning and progress.

Equity for all learners

- Staff understand well the social, economic and cultural factors that impact on the lives of children and their families. They have taken positive steps to minimise the cost of the school day. For example, staff provide ready access to a stock of pre-loved uniform items. In addition, the headteacher signposts families to relevant community resources for support.
- The Parent Council supports the life and work of the school very well. They contribute funds to enhance all children's experiences, for example, by fully funding trips and part funding the P7 residential. This ensures that no child misses out on experiences due to financial barriers.
- The headteacher uses PEF to provide additional staffing and resources to support children to improve their attainment in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher has identified the need to continuously review the use of PEF. Staff now need to measure and evaluate more effectively the impact of PEF interventions in closing identified gaps in children's attainment. This should help demonstrate more robustly which supports are having a positive impact on accelerating children's progress in attainment and achievement.

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.