

Summarised inspection findings

Coulter Primary School

South Lanarkshire Council

20 December 2022

Key contextual information

Coulter Primary School is a small rural school situated in the village of Coulter in South Lanarkshire. The catchment area is the village of Coulter and the surrounding farms. The school roll is 15. Almost all children transfer to Biggar High School for their secondary education. Although all children are in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) five to eight they face many issues relating to the rurality of the school. More than half of children require additional support with their learning or wellbeing.

The school building has two classrooms, a gym/dining hall and an open space. The outdoor play area includes a vegetable garden, willow dome, trim trail and a designated area for ball games.

The headteacher splits her time between Coulter and Lamington Primary Schools. She has been in post for 16 years. Almost all of the staff are well established at the school.

Staff are proud of the remote learning they provided to children during COVID-19 school closures. Children and their families appreciated the quality of the learning and teaching during this time. All children who required a tablet computer following the first school closure were allocated one to reduce any barriers to learning at home. A few parents who experienced connectivity issues appreciated staff delivering paper packs to them.

1.3 Leadership of change

very 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

- The highly effective and very well regarded headteacher provides outstanding support to the school community. She demonstrates a strong commitment to children who attend this small rural school and strives to ensure all children 'can be the best they can be'. The headteacher demonstrates her duty of care to children and their families and is greatly appreciated by the school community. She values, respects and treats individuals fairly and equitably.
- The school's vision and values are ambitious. They focus on improving outcomes for all children by working with all stakeholders to plan an integrated approach to learning and teaching. Parents, staff and learners are involved in regularly reviewing the vision and values. All stakeholders take part in questionnaires and surveys to ensure that the vision remains relevant for the learners at Coulter Primary School. Children talk confidently about how they demonstrate the values of responsibility, courage, equality, respect and honesty in their work, actions and friendships. Staff display the school's values attractively and prominently in classrooms and shared spaces.
- All staff are proud to work at Coulter Primary School. Staff have a very clear understanding of their community. They understand the social, economic and cultural context of the local community very well. They use this knowledge to develop their daily teaching practice very well. The headteacher takes a systematic approach to career long professional learning. She

links this to professional standards very successfully. Staff value professional learning in nurture and attachment. This is supporting them to develop a detailed understanding of how children's learning and wellbeing has been impacted by the pandemic.

- The headteacher leads the pace of change very successfully and carefully. Staff use a wide range of robust information and data very effectively to inform school improvement priorities. The headteacher protects time for staff to engage effectively in professional dialogue, learning and self-evaluation. Staff contribute successfully to working groups who take forward priorities to improve literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and outdoor learning. Staff readily take on an increasing range of important leadership roles in the school for literacy, numeracy, digital technologies and nurture. A few teachers lead professional learning across the school cluster and regionally. As a next step, teachers should consider how professional enquiry can become a regular feature of their approach to continuous improvement.
- The headteacher gathers information thoroughly to help her understand what parents and other stakeholders want to improve at the school. For example, parents support the need to develop further the school's approaches to outdoor learning. There is scope to engage parents and other stakeholders further in evaluating the success of school improvement priorities and the impact on outcomes for children.
- The school receives a small amount of grant funding. All parents contribute to the 'participatory budgeting' processes. This ensures that they are able to influence how the school's grant is used. The staff have taken account of the increased cost of travel in a remote rural area in making decisions on spending. Parents have prioritised the funding of school trips, outings and swimming lessons for all children. Children are developing further important skills for life because of these expanded opportunities.
- The headteacher and staff are very committed to listening to and acting on the ideas children have to improve their school. Children have very good opportunities to express their views during assemblies, classroom meetings, through digital applications and in discussion with the headteacher leading to a number of changes. As a result children have made effective changes to 'skill-sharing events' and inter-disciplinary learning this session. This is supporting children to take greater responsibility and leadership of their school and helping them to develop important skills for learning, life and work. The Pupils Parliament provides an opportunity for learners to engage with How Good Is OUR School? Children identify what they would like to see improved in the school. As a result children have made effective changes to 'skill-sharing events' and playground activities.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Children at Coulter Primary School experience a very caring and nurturing ethos. Relationships across the school are very positive and reflect the school values and children's rights. Children interact respectfully with their peers, adults, and visitors to the school. Staff have created bright, stimulating learning environments that promote independence and curiosity. Children's achievements and successes are proudly displayed throughout the school. As a result, children are motivated and ready learn.
- Across the school almost all children engage very well in their learning. Teachers have consistently high expectations of all learners. They motivate and inspire children to make very good progress in their learning. Almost all children work well in pairs and groups. Teachers use a range of interesting approaches to support collaborative working. Children are skilled at working with others to achieve success in a range of learning activities. They are respectful of each other and participate enthusiastically in class discussions. In a few lessons, teachers could increase the pace of learning, allowing children to begin tasks more quickly.
- Teachers use a well-established learning and teaching policy to inform their practice. They have used this to create a helpful 'placemat' outlining clearly the features of highly-effective learning and teaching. Children contributed to this 'placemat', sharing with staff what they need to help them move on in their learning. Staff and children review and refresh the 'placemat' annually. It is displayed in all learning areas and is used to inform planning. This ensures agreed approaches and standards can lead to consistently high-quality learning experiences across the school.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers deliver learning activities matched to the needs of almost all children. They ensure differentiation is planned for and evident during learning. Teachers provide very clear and helpful explanations and instructions in all lessons. Staff provide children with appropriate support and challenge in almost all lessons. Teachers deliver well-structured lessons. They ensure that the purpose and the outcomes of the lesson are shared, clearly displayed, and referred to throughout the lesson. In almost all lessons, children co-create how they will be successful in their learning in their own words. Children understand fully what success looks like. Teachers are increasing opportunities for children to plan and lead their learning. In almost all lessons, teachers use questioning well to check for understanding and deepen children's thinking.
- Teachers have introduced fluid groupings recently across all stages. Children are working as a whole school group during Physical Education (PE) lessons and enterprise activities. Teachers are using this approach well to explore differentiation including support and challenge for all. Children are developing further their skills in teamwork, negotiation and communication as they work with children across the school. They are motivated and engaged in these activities.

Older children enjoy paired reading with the younger children. Staff should build on this to extend the use of the school library to encourage children to access a wide range of texts.

- The headteacher takes a comprehensive approach to monitoring the quality of children's experiences and the progress learners are making. Her approaches to the quality assurance of teaching and learning is leading to a wide range of learning environments and strong, creative teaching approaches. She provides high quality feedback to teachers including guidance on what to do next to improve their practice further. As a result, all staff are committed to achieving excellence and equity for all learners.

- Teachers use technology very well to enrich learning experiences. Children record their learning using digital cameras and access a range of interactive tasks using virtual learning platforms. Recently, children created podcasts for the local community to showcase their learning. Children's digital literacy skills are developing well because of this approach.
- Teachers are at the early stages of using play. They have created a shared space to encourage role play linked to learning about the world of work. Children have been involved in selecting resources for this learning space. Teachers are beginning to explore how to develop this approach to meet the needs of all learners. They are interested in learning more about how observations can support assessment.
- Staff have a clear statement on using assessment as part of learning. This ensures teachers plan assessment as part of the learning cycle. Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment approaches in lessons. They use the information gathered to inform their planning. Children set targets with teachers in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They identify steps they will take to meet their learning targets. Teachers should continue to support children to identify meaningful targets linked to the skills they are developing across the curriculum. This will help children to fully understand their strengths and next steps in learning.
- Teachers have engaged in moderation activities within the school and learning community. They articulate well how this supports their judgements of children's progress within a level. Teachers should continue to work with colleagues in and beyond the school to moderate children's work in order to develop their judgement further.
- Teachers plan well using Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. They use a whole school rolling curriculum programme well to support effective planning for the multi-composite classes. Teachers use a wide range of national guidance and resources to support planning in literacy and numeracy. They adapt resources effectively to meet the needs of learners in their classes.
- Teachers track the progress of individual learners, including those who have additional support needs, very well. Teachers identify potential barriers to learning quickly and plan appropriate supports to help children progress. They use a staged intervention approach very effectively to ensure children receive the right help at the right time. They are particularly skilled at using technology during literacy and numeracy lessons to support children to fully access their learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers plan for effective progression pathways across all curriculum areas. The progression pathways ensure children experience appropriate breadth and depth in their learning. Teachers make effective use of experiences and outcomes to plan literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across the curriculum. For example, children use their information handling skills well to present data in science. Children enjoy choosing contexts for their interdisciplinary learning projects. Teachers should continue to plan meaningful opportunities for children to influence the curriculum.
- Children across the school experience a strong 1+2 modern languages programme. Teachers deliver a progressive French curriculum across the school. All children learn German as their second language. Children talk positively about the language skills and cultural knowledge they are gaining. Teachers worked with the local community to plan opportunities for children to use their French language skills through the 'Bonjour in Biggar' project. Children learned phrases to use in local shops and businesses. Children value the opportunity to use their skills beyond the classroom.
- Staff review the curriculum regularly to ensure it is relevant to the schools' unique context. All children participate in swimming lessons. This supports children to develop an understanding of the risks and benefits of the local river and wild swimming. Children participate in rugby lessons. Teachers work with the local rugby club to support children to engage in community activities and events.
- Teachers make use of the school grounds and local community to take learning outdoors. Children enjoy the 'Walk on Wednesday' and talk positively about learning within their local area. The headteacher is working with staff to develop a progressive outdoor learning programme. This should continue to enrich children's learning across the curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents value the nurturing ethos in the school. Children are safe, cared for and included. The headteacher and staff support parents very well and parents appreciate this.
- Parents and partners are involved extensively in supporting the curriculum. For example, baking, crafts and musical skills, aspects of PE and Religious and Moral Education. This is leading to children developing skills for life, learning and work as well as their understanding of their place in the community. The school's App and the social media page enables parents to share in learning experiences and parents agree that communication is a strength.
- The school is committed to reducing the cost of the school day and this has impacted positively on children and families. There are opportunities for trips and events at no cost to families, ensuring children benefit from a wide range of experiences.

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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very 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

- Staff talk confidently about how children's rights help to guide their work and is at the heart of everything they do. This is impacting very positively on children's understanding of their rights and their overall wellbeing. All children say that they are respected and treated fairly. The focus on children's rights is helping children to recognise their rights and those of others in real life situations. Staff and children have a very good understanding of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the wellbeing indicators. Together, they recognise the importance of building on children's understanding of rights and how these impact on aspects of wellbeing such as being safe, happy, achieving and nurtured. This is leading to a very welcoming and nurturing school ethos where children participate successfully in decision making. Consequently, children are happy, safe and secure at school.
- Children across the school respect staff and one another. They interact with each other and adults with compassion and empathy. Staff support children well to use the school values to reflect on their behaviour and actions. Children are skilled at using approaches to resolving any difficulties that arise. Older children value their role as playtime leaders. They understand and are proud of their role in ensuring all children are included and safe in the playground.
- Staff are committed to improving wellbeing outcomes for all children. They know children very well and have a strong understanding of their strengths, family circumstances and support needs. The headteacher and staff assess and monitor the wellbeing needs of children routinely, implementing appropriate supports when necessary. Children have regular conversations with staff and this enables staff to support their social and emotional needs. The headteacher works very effectively with class teachers to consider how they can improve wellbeing outcomes for learners. The school works very well with a range of partners to support children and families who require additional help.
- Children self-assess their wellbeing needs annually using the wellbeing indicators and a simple colour coded scoring system. At a glance, teachers can identify children's wellbeing concerns and put appropriate strategies in place to address these. As a result, all children are making progress in their wellbeing. Children have daily and weekly check-ins using digital platforms. This helps manage their emotions and regulate their behaviours successfully. Staff use this information effectively to monitor children's wellbeing and respond quickly and sensitively to any worries and concerns. Children trust the adults in the school as a result. All children feel safe at school and can identify at least one adult they can talk to if they are worried or upset.
- Children are developing a good understanding of what it means to be safe and healthy. They know what they can do to be healthy and they are developing a good awareness about keeping safe. This is achieved with a progressive health and wellbeing curriculum. Children understand issues related to bullying and the risks associated with using social media. They think carefully about the importance of developing a positive mind set. The headteacher

recognises the importance of talking to children about their learning and wellbeing. She has implemented a range of effective opportunities for staff and children to take part in wellbeing conversations. This leads to staff and children having a very good understanding of how to continually improve aspects of health and wellbeing. Children regularly set their own personal targets for health and wellbeing. They talk about how these targets, and the opportunities they have to discuss them with teachers, help them improve their wellbeing.

- Children enjoy the swimming lessons they access through their PE programme. Almost all children benefit from the impact of PE and sport on improving their health. The school has very good links with partners in the local community and beyond to ensure that children can access a range of lunch time and after-school sporting activities such as rugby, dance, table tennis and curling. This is helping children's understanding of physical and mental health.
- The local authority submitted self-evaluation information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and related key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff. The HNI also examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school health promotion duties as far as they relate to food and nutrition. There were no identified areas for development at the time of the inspection.
- The headteacher is aware that a few children and their families need support to attend school more regularly following the pandemic. She tracks and monitors attendance robustly, putting in appropriate supports where necessary. Parents receive a termly report on their child's attendance. Staff share helpful child-friendly posters which helps children know if their attendance is improving. There are promising signs that attendance is improving because of these interventions.
- Staff have very good approaches to identifying and supporting children who require additional help with their learning and those who may be affected by social or economic issues. Staff, parents and partners work very well together to assess the needs of children who are facing barriers to their learning. Class teachers have a good understanding of the additional support needs of children and employ a range of strategies to help children overcome these barriers. Approaches to identifying and recording progress using a staged intervention process are very good and individual targets for children are well matched to what they need to do in order to make good progress. The school ensures that children are involved in contributing to their learning and have opportunities to evaluate their own progress.
- Staff have created an inclusive environment in which all children have equal opportunities to learn and participate in wider activities. The school's work towards developing a rights based approach to learning is resulting in a very good understanding of equality and diversity. An intergenerational project is helping to build social cohesion in a small rural community. Children plan afternoon teas and 'Soup days' where they invite pensioners to join them for a chat. Working with partners, teachers have taken this approach further. Children and pensioners share their thoughts about climate change and local issues. These discussions have been captured in a series of podcasts. As a result, children respect and value the opinions of others and understand that these may differ from their own.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very 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

- The number of children at each stage varies and is relatively small. Overall statements have been made about attainment and progress to ensure individuals are not identified.
- Attainment was impacted negatively during periods of remote learning. Staff made effective use of data to plan learning in literacy and numeracy to address identified gaps. There has been a strong focus on new approaches to teaching writing and numeracy to accelerate progress. Data demonstrates that predicted achievement of a level for this session shows an overall return to pre-pandemic levels.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is very good. A few children are exceeding national expectations.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall children are making very good progress in literacy and English. Children with additional support needs are making good progress from prior levels of attainment.

Listening and talking

- Overall, children make very good progress in listening and talking. Across the school, children interact well with each other and adults. They articulate their views confidently. Children listen carefully to the ideas and opinions of their peers. They use technology to record audio clips to share information about their learning with peers, parents and visitors to the school. Children speak clearly and use intonation well.

Reading

- Overall, children are making good progress in reading. As children move through the school, they read with increasing fluency and expression. Younger children recognise a range of blends and sounds. They use this knowledge to decode new words. Older children answer increasingly challenging questions about their class novel. Children across the school now need to explore a wider range of texts, including non-fiction. This should deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding of author style and their own reading preferences.

Writing

- Overall, children make very good progress in writing. Younger children write a few sentences using capital letters and full stops accurately. They use adjectives to add interesting detail to their stories. Younger children use time connectives well to structure reports and instructions. Older children write across a range of genre. They make effective use of techniques such as metaphors and rhetorical questions to capture and maintain the reader's interest. Children apply their writings skills well across the school and across the curriculum.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall children are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children with additional support needs are making good progress from prior levels of attainment.

Number, money and measure

- There is a strong focus on number work in lessons. Younger children add and subtract three digit numbers. They use a range of strategies, including concrete materials, to help them solve problems. Younger children tell the time using o'clock and half past. They use digital and analogue displays. Older children use number skills to work out profit and loss. They order negative numbers accurately. Older children work confidently with large numbers across all four operations.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children identify properties of simple two-dimensional shapes. They use their knowledge of shape to create tiling patterns. Older children describe angles using language such as reflex, straight and acute. They calculate the perimeter of simple shapes.

Information handling

- Children create graphs and charts in science. They should develop further their skills in collecting, analysing and displaying data.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher is aware that the changing roll and variations in class sizes makes it difficult to identify trends over time. She is acutely aware of the needs of individual learners and has robust processes in place to track attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics over time. The headteacher works with staff to ensure data is used effectively to plan support to close gaps for individual learners. This is ensuring high levels of attainment are maintained and children with barriers to their learning are making progress over time. Staff track children's attainment and progress across the curriculum.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children have been very successful in leading after school and lunch time clubs and committees. There are positive links with local sports clubs such as rugby and cricket and all children have a voice in the Pupil Parliament. This is leading to children becoming confident individuals and responsible citizens. Children demonstrate their contribution to school life through achieving weekly certificates linked to the four capacities. Children can nominate peers for certificates, helping them to recognise the contribution of others. They celebrate the skills they are acquiring at assemblies and on the Tree of Achievement display. The headteacher and staff have effective systems in place to record and track achievements and the development of skills. They ensure equity by encouraging and enabling children to take part in a range of activities. The school have been awarded their fifth Eco flag and have taken part in the John Muir award, which is enabling children to demonstrate a clear understanding of environmental challenges.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a strong understanding of the range of barriers to learning children may face. They are particularly aware of the unique opportunities and challenges children living in a rural community face. The headteacher secures funding from a range of partners to support activities beyond the classroom. This ensures all children access the wide range of experiences on offer. The headteacher tracks closely the progress and attainment of all children with potential barriers to their learning. Teachers work effectively with each other to identify specific gaps in children's learning and achievement during Pupil Progress Meetings. They act quickly to plan and implement strategies to close the gaps. Teachers ensure their planning is flexible to meet learner's individual needs. The headteacher tracks the progress and attainment of the most vulnerable children effectively. There is robust evidence to demonstrate staff are beginning to close the attainment gap.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The headteacher's approach ensures that children, who attend a small rural school, have a wide range of opportunities and experiences. This contributes to their overall wellbeing and progress.

Working with a wide range of partners, teachers ensure that children participate in sporting, cultural and social events not readily accessible in a remote community. Partners support children to experience traditional sports such as curling and rugby. This is developing children's understanding of the major sports in Scotland.

The conversations between senior citizens and children leads to a valuable record of intergenerational ideas and beliefs on current social issues and is providing a precious legacy for the school. Children are leading the development of Soup day and afternoon teas for more vulnerable senior citizens. This is contributing to breaking down social isolation in a rural area. Children are learning important transferable skills which is supporting learners to develop key skills for learning, life and work.

The headteacher has been concerned for many years about the cost of the school day. Working with the school community, she has identified the impact of rural poverty on the community. She uses this information to target an offer of strong support wherever it is needed. She accesses grants and donations successfully and uses these to ensure no child misses out on important learning experiences.

Staff ensure that all children experience as broad and varied a curriculum as possible. Teachers from Lamington School lead writing development and teach writing at Coulter Primary School. Children benefit from high quality learning experiences across the curriculum as a result. Community members, linked to the local church, support both religious observance and religious education. Other partners introduce musical instruments in addition to their music learning in class. Parents freely give up their time throughout the year and use their skills in floristry, baking and creative activities to support the curriculum. These opportunities are linked very closely to the school's progression pathways. The wealth of experiences children have at the school helps them to make connections across learning.

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.