Summarised inspection findings

St. Mary's Primary School

North Lanarkshire Council

27 August 2024

Key contextual information

St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Class is located in the suburb of Whifflet in Coatbridge, North Lanarkshire. There are nine classes in the primary school and the current roll is 210. Forty-eight children attend the nursery class. Thirty-nine percent of children who attend St. Mary's reside in deciles 1 or 2 of the Scottish Index of Social Deprivation (SIMD). This session, the school received £49,000 from the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and £22,072 was carried forward from the previous financial year.

The headteacher has been in post for just over five years. She is supported by two depute headteachers. One of the depute headteacher posts is an acting position financed through PEF. Due to long-term staff absences, there have been several changes to the senior leadership team (SLT) in recent years. The SLT will be restructured next session in line with policy at local authority level. The composition of the staff team in the nursery class will also change as a result of this process.

1.3 Leadership of change	weak
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	

■ St. Mary's Primary School has a warm and welcoming ethos which reflects Gospel values. Staff, children, parents and partners are keen to support and promote the school and are proud to be members of the St. Mary's community. Almost all relationships across the school are positive and built on mutual respect.

■ Senior leaders consulted with the whole school community several years ago and collectively agreed on the six shared values of safe, kindness, respect, responsibility, faith and happiness. Staff and children demonstrate these values in their daily interactions with each other. The values are displayed prominently throughout the school and each one is aligned with a house group. As planned, senior leaders should review the school's vision, values and aims with all stakeholders to ensure that they reflect the current context of the school.

■ Senior leaders use a range of data, including stakeholder feedback, to help them identify priorities for the school improvement plan. They now need to use this data more effectively to inform their planning for improvement. This session, the improvement plan focuses on increasing attainment in literacy and numeracy and promoting wider achievements in the primary stages. It also includes the development of approaches to using observations in the nursery class and the implementation of a cluster approach to improving attendance. Senior leaders should now ensure that there are clear, measurable and suitably ambitious targets to improve attainment for all children. The plan should include a stronger focus on delivering, and evidencing, improved attainment in literacy and numeracy across all stages and on increasing pupil attendance. Senior leaders need to increase the pace of change and improvement and ensure that they use more robust self-evaluation and quality assurance processes to inform their improvement planning.

- Senior leaders have an extensive knowledge of the needs of the children and their families. They understand the impact that the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has had on the local socio-economic context and on the community's wellbeing. Senior leaders identified correctly the need to spend the school's PEF allocation on raising attainment and ensuring that all children have equity of opportunity to achieve. They encourage staff, parents and children to contribute to the decision-making process. However, there is an important need for senior leaders to use data more effectively to identify correctly the poverty-related attainment gaps across the school. Senior leaders should track more closely the impact of all improvement activity, including funded interventions and use of resources. They need to review and analyse progress thoroughly at regular intervals and make adjustments to remits and plans as required. This will help them to improve the extent to which they are accelerating progress and closing poverty-related attainment gaps.

- There are important weaknesses in the school's strategic approach to implementing improvement and change. Senior leaders need to ensure that they implement a systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring all aspects of the work of the school. This includes evaluating learning and teaching and reviewing children's work on a regular basis. Senior leaders need to identify areas of strength and development requirements across the school and provide high-quality feedback to individual teachers. This will support teachers to improve approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and to raise attainment.

- Teachers engage in an appropriate range of professional learning activities, with a strong focus on the promotion of wellbeing. At the beginning of this session, teachers initiated new working groups to take forward aspects of the curriculum within the school. Senior leaders now need to ensure that the working groups have clearly defined remits that link closely to school improvement priorities. Each group should have specific and measurable targets to work towards in an agreed timeframe. Senior leaders and teachers should evaluate progress together systematically at regular intervals and review plans as required. This will help to ensure continued momentum towards achieving the identified improvements.

- A minority of children across the school have the opportunity to be part of several new leadership groups. These groups are focusing on areas such as improving the outdoor learning environment and promoting social justice. Children are enthused about their involvement in leading these improvements and are well-placed to make an important contribution to positive change in the school. Senior leaders need to ensure that children's leadership groups have clear action plans with appropriate timescales and suitable measures of success. This will support the children to lead improvement and evidence the impact of their work successfully.

- The school has a well-established house system that enables all children to come together to discuss aspects of school life. Most children feel that staff take their views into account, but a significant minority do not agree or are unsure if this is the case. Staff should ensure that children get regular feedback on their input. They should also give children more opportunities to discuss and inform approaches to learning and teaching across the school. This will help to increase the influence of pupil voice in supporting improvement.

- The Parent Council includes representation from both the school and nursery class. It has regular meetings that are well attended and provides helpful feedback to senior leaders on a range of issues. Senior leaders should now consider how they can involve more fully all parents in school improvement. They should build on existing practice and develop further approaches to encourage and enable more parents to engage with consultation activities.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	weak

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 work well together to create a calm and nurturing learning environment. Almost all children are polite, well behaved and are proud of their school. Children understand the school values and the importance of treating each other with kindness and respect. Relationships between adults and children, and between children and their peers, are positive.

■ Learning environments are well organised and teachers establish appropriate routines that support smooth transitions for children. As a next step, they should incorporate more examples of children's work in class displays and use these to highlight important aspects of learning. This will also provide children with greater ownership of their learning environment and foster a sense of pride in their achievements. Staff should also consider how to make best use of all available space, including the outdoors, to support children's learning and wellbeing.

■ Children are attentive and willingly take part in lessons. They work well individually and in groups. The presentation of written work in jotters is of a high standard. However, the majority of lessons are too teacher-led and lack sufficient pace and challenge. Teachers now need to ensure that learning across the curriculum is planned at the right level of difficulty and includes more opportunities for children to lead their own learning. This should support children to be more fully engaged and make better progress.

■ In the majority of lessons, teachers refer to prior and future learning, helping children to make links across their learning. Teachers now need to use a consistent and effective approach to sharing what constitutes successful learning. This will help children to evaluate their own learning and understand what they need to do next to improve.

■ Across the school, teachers need to improve the quality of their questioning to support children's learning. In a minority of lessons, teachers use questioning well to check for understanding. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning to support children to develop their higher order thinking skills. Teachers should ensure that they use this form of questioning more regularly to help children engage in critical thinking.

■ Children are able to talk about aspects of their learning with their parents and other adults. They benefit from verbal feedback on their work. However, teachers do not provide written feedback that is of a consistently high quality across the curriculum. Teachers should ensure that all feedback supports children to understand the progress they are making and identify clearly their next steps in learning. In a minority of lessons, children are encouraged to use self and peer-assessment. Children would benefit from a more consistent, whole school approach to using self and peer-assessment to help them to improve their understanding, confidence and accuracy when evaluating progress.

- In a few lessons, teachers use games and activities to reinforce key concepts. In these examples, children are engaged and enthusiastic about learning. Teachers now need to develop further active learning approaches across the school in all areas of the curriculum. This should include increasing the use of investigative, exploratory and open-ended learning activities.

- Teachers at P1 and P2 are at the initial stages of developing play-based approaches to learning. They should continue to engage in professional learning, taking account of national guidance, and link more closely with staff in the nursery class. This will help teachers to develop a clear rationale for play. It will also support them to provide children with a range of learning experiences that are age appropriate and meet their learning needs.

- Across the school, staff are developing their use of digital technologies to enhance learning and teaching. In most classes, children are able to access games to support their learning through scanning digital codes. In a minority of lessons, digital technology is used to support learning effectively. Staff should develop further their knowledge and skills in using digital technology. They should consider how to deliver digital technology experiences and outcomes more effectively and use digital learning to improve learning across the curriculum.

- There are important weaknesses in approaches to assessing and planning children's learning. Teachers do not have a clear understanding of children's progress. Senior leaders and teachers need to implement fully a whole school approach to assessment across the curriculum. This should help teachers to gather relevant data at agreed times of the year. Senior leaders and teachers need to develop further their skills in analysing and using assessment information effectively. This will help them to evaluate accurately children's progress and inform their planning for future learning.

- The quality of forward planning is not yet of a consistently high standard across the school. Teachers need to ensure that their plans include sufficient detail about what children in all groups are expected to learn, based on robust assessment data. Teachers should include information about timescales, planned assessment and evaluations of progress. The development of an agreed format and a shared understanding of what constitutes effective planning will support teachers to meet better all children's learning needs.

- Senior leaders meet with teachers to discuss children's progress in literacy and numeracy. During these meetings, they review children who are evaluated as being on track to achieve, off track or making inconsistent progress. Senior leaders and teachers do not have a clear or shared understanding of these definitions. This is an important area for improvement. Senior leaders need to improve the rigour of discussions about attainment and ensure that next steps are identified clearly. They should also ensure that tracking meetings take place prior to the completion of forward planning. This will support teachers to use assessment and progress information more effectively to inform planning for individuals and groups.

- Teachers do not yet have an appropriate understanding of national standards. Senior leaders need to support teachers to develop further their understanding of the moderation cycle. Teachers would benefit greatly from participation in planned moderation activities, both within their own establishment and with colleagues across the cluster schools. Teachers recognise these opportunities would help them to develop a better understanding of children's progress across and within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. This will also support teachers to be more confident and accurate when making professional judgements about children's achievement of a level.

- Senior leaders and staff should track and monitor attainment more rigorously, particularly for those children impacted by poverty and those who require additional support with their

learning. This will help them to identify and address specific gaps in children's learning more effectively.

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2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

■ Senior leaders should continue with plans to work with the school community to develop a clear curriculum rationale for St. Mary's Primary School, ensuring all stakeholders' views are taken into account. This will support the school in recognising how their local context impacts on the curriculum they provide.

■ Teachers have access to progressive skills frameworks and curriculum maps for all areas of the curriculum.

■ Children learn Spanish from P1 to P7. Spanish is promoted in all classes and highlighted around the school in attractive displays. In line with the 1+2 language policy, children in P5 to P7 learn French.

■ The school has two small library areas. Children are enthusiastic about reading for enjoyment and would benefit greatly from these areas being developed further. Children require access to a much wider variety of books to promote reading for enjoyment. Staff should also encourage children to access available digital texts.

■ Children receive their entitlement to religious education each week and teachers use resources from the Diocese. Religious education includes a very positive partnership with St. Mary's and St. Bernard's Parish. This is supporting children's spiritual development well.

■ Children do not receive consistently their full entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education (PE) per week. Senior leaders and teachers should consider how to make best use of the extensive outdoor environment when planning for physical education.

■ Outdoor learning is at the early stages of development. A few children have had opportunities to grow their own vegetables in the school poly tunnel. Staff should utilise more fully the outdoor areas around the school grounds to enhance children's learning experiences across the curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

■ The Parent Council impact positively on the wider life of the school. This includes organising events and raising funds to support a range of activities. All children benefit from experiences, such as trips and events, being fully funded so that cost is not a barrier. Almost all parents feel that they are encouraged to be involved in the work of the Parent Council and that communication with the parent forum is effective.

■ Parents appreciate updates relating to the school provided by senior leaders. A minority of parents would like a greater level of consultation. Senior leaders should involve parents more fully in the creation and review of school priorities.

■ Parents are keen to support their children's learning. Most parents feel they receive helpful feedback about how their child is progressing. They are invited to meet the teacher at the start of the school year. Parents receive two written reports and there are two parents' meetings each year. They are invited to take part in the 'jotter conferencing' sessions twice per year and appreciate this opportunity to visit their child's class and review their work. Teachers share with parents termly newsletters outlining the planned learning for the term. Parents work in partnership with the school to prepare their children for the sacraments.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter for urgency.

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

- The whole-school approach to developing a nurturing, caring environment supports most children to feel cared for and valued. All staff use their knowledge of the context of the school and families effectively to support children's wellbeing needs. As a result, most children feel safe in school and say they have someone they can speak to if they are upset or worried.

- Almost all children across the school display consistently high standards of positive behaviour. Most parents feel their child's behaviour is managed effectively. All staff have clear expectations of children's behaviour and reinforce expectations in a calm and consistent manner. They encourage and support children to demonstrate positive behaviour through their use of nurturing principles, school values and the house system. A few children continue to require targeted support to regulate their emotions and manage the school day. Senior leaders and staff have individual plans in place that set out proactive strategies for staff to use to support these children. This includes daily check-ins with an adult and an adapted curriculum. As a result, behaviour is well supported and managed across the school.

- Staff are beginning to engage with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children have created class charters and a few children can talk about a few of their rights. Senior leaders should now progress with plans to ensure that there is a more consistent approach to helping children understand fully their needs and rights under the UNCRC.

- Senior leaders and staff discuss the wellbeing indicators with children at assemblies. At times, individual classes focus on developing children's understanding of the indicators. Staff need to promote the wellbeing indicators more fully. They should establish a shared language to help children to talk about their wellbeing. This would support children to improve their understanding of the value and importance of the wellbeing indicators. Senior leaders have identified the need to re-establish the regular tracking and monitoring of children's progress in health and wellbeing. This will help to ensure that all children's wellbeing is supported as well as possible.

- Teachers use a range of resources and approaches to support children's health and wellbeing. This includes a programme to help children to learn how to regulate their emotions in different situations. Children across the school have opportunities to be active during the school day, including PE lessons and sporting activities delivered by teaching staff and partners. These inputs are supporting children to have a clearer understanding about their own physical wellbeing. Senior leaders should now further enhance all aspects of the health and wellbeing curriculum. This should include, for example, aspects of nutrition through more practical healthy eating and cooking inputs. Including staff, children and families in any consultation on the wellbeing curriculum would further support developments in this area.

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and 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 and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Areas for development have been agreed with the local authority that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- Children are beginning to develop their understanding of equality and diversity. They celebrate diversity through assemblies and class activities. Teachers should continue to increase children's understanding of diversity within the context of the local community. They should ensure all children have improved access to books and resources which support their learning about diversity in Scotland.

- All staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and keeping children safe. They have completed training in line with their responsibilities and codes of practice. Senior leaders record instances of bullying allegations in accordance with local and national guidance. Most children and parents report the school deals appropriately with bullying, or that they have never experienced bullying.

- Senior leaders and staff understand the individual learning and wellbeing needs of children. Children with additional support needs have individualised plans in place. Staff involve most parents and children in creating these plans. Senior leaders should work with teachers to improve the quality of targets within individual education plans. They need to identify clearly the interim steps to be taken to help a child who requires additional support to achieve specified learning outcomes. Senior leaders should ensure that they review all individualised plans regularly, in consultation with children and parents, to measure the progress children are making in their learning. They should also record the outcomes of all additional support reviews.

- Senior leaders work with class teachers to identify children who will benefit from targeted interventions to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders should review their processes for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of interventions to support children with identified barriers to learning, including those impacted by their socio-economic circumstances. This will help to ensure that interventions are effective and lead to improved outcomes for the most vulnerable learners.

- Staff work effectively with a range of partners to support children as they come to school from early years settings or move on to secondary school. These partners include, for example, staff from the associated primary schools and local secondary school, an educational psychologist, and a speech and language therapist. This approach results in children feeling more confident about transitions and more able to communicate their needs. Children requiring additional support benefit from enhanced transition arrangements.

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
- Across the school, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. Overall, the majority of children across the school have achieved, or are on track to achieve, appropriate levels of attainment. The majority of children are making satisfactory progress from previous levels of attainment.

- Most children with additional support needs are making satisfactory progress towards their individual targets in learning. A significant number of children across the school, including those with additional support needs, are capable of making better progress.

Attainment in literacy and English
- Across all levels, most children are making good progress in listening and talking. Most children are making satisfactory progress in reading and writing.

Listening and talking
- Children at early level listen and respond appropriately to teachers' instructions. They are enthusiastic in sharing their ideas and feelings with others. They need to continue to develop skills in turn taking and listening to others. Children at first and second levels communicate their ideas and thoughts confidently and clearly. At second level, children successfully build on the contributions of others by asking or answering questions and supporting others' opinions.

Reading
- Children at early level discuss stories they like to listen to. They recognise the cover, title, author and illustrator. They are developing their confidence in using sounds, letters and patterns to read words. Children at first level offer their own ideas about the characters, writer's use of language and setting. They require more support to answer literal and evaluative questions about texts. Children at second level can apply a range of reading skills well to read and understand texts, including skimming, scanning, predicating, and summarising. They are less confident at identifying techniques authors use to engage readers, for example, word choice and emotive language.

Writing
- Children at early level form lowercase letters legibly and make attempts to spell familiar words correctly. They are beginning to use capital letters and full stops in their writing. Children at first level spell most commonly used words correctly. They are able to create a variety of texts for different purposes. Children at second level attempt to engage the reader through use of vocabulary appropriate to the genre they are using in their writing. They are developing skills in acknowledging sources in persuasive writing pieces. Children across the school would benefit

from having more regular and personalised opportunities to write independently. This includes writing in a variety of play, imaginative and real-life contexts.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics from prior levels of attainment.

- At all levels, children need more regular opportunities to revisit numeracy and mathematics concepts across the school year and through a range of real-life contexts.

Number, money and measure

- Children at early level understand and use numbers to 30. They correctly name the days of the week in sequence and know the months of the year. They are developing confidence in adding and subtracting within 10. Children at first level confidently solve addition and subtraction problems with two-digit whole numbers. They are less sure when completing calculations involving larger numbers. They understand time, using half past, quarter past and quarter to, and read analogue and digital times. Children at second level understand place value. They express fractions in their simplest form. They require more practice in calculating percentages of quantities and using this knowledge to solve real-life problems.

Shape, position and movement

- Children at early level use positional language effectively and describe the properties of two-dimensional (2D) shapes. They need support to develop their skills in identifying the properties of three-dimensional objects. Children at first level successfully identify more than one line of symmetry in pictures, nature and 2D shapes. They are less confident in recognising right angles. Children at second level recognise and understand different angles including acute, obtuse, straight and reflex. They need to develop their knowledge of the radius, diameter and circumference of a circle.

Information handling

- Children at early level interpret simple graphs to find out information. Children at first level extract key information from a variety of data sets including charts, bar graphs and tables. Children at second level interpret information and draw conclusions from graphs with accuracy. Across the school, children need more opportunities to develop information handling skills, including through digital technology.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders and teachers track the attainment and progress of children in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Current processes and systems do not yet provide a reliable and clear picture of individual children's attainment over time. Staff do not have a shared understanding of national standards. Senior leaders and teachers need to engage in regular moderation activities within their own school and beyond. This should help them to gather more robust information and make more accurate judgements about children's progress.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children take part in newly established pupil leadership groups and contribute to house activities. They also work towards gaining accredited awards for their school in areas such as digital learning and the promotion of children's rights. Older children have the opportunity to participate in the Pope Francis Faith Award. Children participate in a range of clubs and activities led by staff, partners and older pupils. These include Gaelic football and netball. Children regularly contribute to the life of the wider community, for example singing at local

events and participating in Parish activities. This is helping children to develop a range of skills and attributes, such as citizenship, empathy and confidence.

■ Children share their achievements, both in and outwith school, at assemblies and via class displays and online platforms. They are proud of their efforts and appreciate the recognition shown by staff and peers. Children need support to recognise the skills for learning, life and work that they are developing. They would benefit from more opportunities to discuss their achievements and skills with others. Staff currently track children's participation, but as planned, they should extend this to include tracking of related skills.

Equity for all learners

■ Staff ensure that all children have equity of opportunity to participate in all activities. Along with their colleagues in the local cluster, they have produced a poverty proofing position statement. Staff use their knowledge of children and families to identify needs and to support them to access financial assistance where required. They provide practical help through initiatives such as uniform recycling. Staff monitor closely the cost of the school day and use additional funding, such as PEF, to reduce or negate the cost of activities. As a result of this approach, no child misses out as a result of their socio-economic circumstances.

■ Senior leaders use assessment data to identify poverty related attainment gaps in literacy and numeracy at all stages across the school. They need to ensure that this data is robust and accurately reflects children's level of attainment. This will support them to target additional funding appropriately to meet best the needs of identified children. Senior leaders should ensure that they measure and demonstrate more effectively the impact of all resources and interventions on accelerating the progress of these children. At present, there is insufficient evidence to determine the extent to which the school is closing poverty related attainment gaps.

■ Senior leaders are working in partnership with colleagues from local schools to develop a shared approach to improving attendance. They have produced a new attendance policy, which outlines tracking and monitoring processes and a timeline for agreed actions. Approaches to improving attendance include questionnaires, regular communication with families, reminders to parents and referral to a cluster forum. Senior leaders have made a start to implementing the policy. Overall attendance rates in 2022/23 were in line with the national and local average. However, just over a third of children currently have attendance rates below 90%. Of these children, a significant minority reside in SIMD 1 or 2. Subsequently, these children are missing out on targeted interventions that are planned to raise their attainment and support their wellbeing. This is an area that requires immediate attention. As a matter of priority, senior leaders should now implement fully the attendance policy. This should include working closely with parents and partners to significantly improve attendance.

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.