

Summarised inspection findings

Southesk Primary School and Nursery Class

Angus Council

2 June 2020

Key contextual information

Southesk Primary School is a non-denominational school located near the harbour to the south of Montrose. It is part of the Montrose Academy cluster. There are 212 children in the primary stages of the school, organised into eight classes. The headteacher, who has been in post since 2016, is currently on a 12 month secondment with the central Angus education team. An acting headteacher has been in post since August 2019. Since then, there has seen an unsettled period for the leadership team due to a range of factors, including periods of absence. At the time of inspection, the acting headteacher was not present. The substantive headteacher returned just prior to the inspection and, supported by the depute headteacher, led the school through the process. References to the headteacher in this report, relate to the substantive headteacher.

1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher has taken account of important aspects of the school's social, economic and cultural context in devising the vision, values and aims for the school. The focus placed on developing children's sense of safety and emotional regulation is an example of this. The school's shared vision and values have been in place for a number of years. Senior leaders recognise the need to review these with stakeholders to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose, and meet the needs of the current school community well.
- There is effective engagement with a wide range of stakeholders in agreeing priorities for school improvement. Staff feel well-consulted and contribute to whole school improvement plan priorities. Through this engagement in planning for improvement, the headteacher is developing a culture of authentic collaboration. Strategic planning for continuous improvement would be more effective with smarter and improved systematic use of data. To allow senior leaders to demonstrate impact more easily, priorities need to be more consistently expressed as measurable outcomes.
- The headteacher, supported by the depute headteacher, has taken action to improve the culture and ethos of the school and raise aspirations. Children, staff, parents and partners respect the headteacher's commitment to ensuring that children feel safe, included and happy at school. She has placed importance on building open, honest and supportive relationships between the school and parents and families. This supports improved outcomes for children. In addition, she has introduced new approaches to planning that now include progressive frameworks for all curricular areas. Many of the school's current initiatives are yet to reach fruition and therefore, it is too early to assess the impact of these changes. This can be attributed to an unsettled period for the senior leadership team over the last six months.
- Staff have a well-developed knowledge of the social, economic and cultural context of the school. This is helping to inform their approaches to equity and their understanding of the needs of children and families.

- There has been positive impact of changes introduced across the school over the last three years. For example, approaches to learners' engagement and the 'learning dispositions' have strengthened the climate and ethos of learning. Agreed approaches to creating a positive learning environment result in classrooms which are well-organised, calm and support children's learning. Teachers are developing a shared understanding of good quality learning, teaching and assessment. Although the quality of learning and teaching is not yet consistent, a shared, agreed structure to the delivery of all lessons is in place across the school. Children respond well to these established routines.
- Staff are well motivated to work collaboratively to bring about school improvement. Senior leaders have established a culture of collaboration and professional learning where staff share their ideas, approaches and strategies. Texts shared as part of the teachers' professional book club support regular professional dialogue. This is focused on improving pedagogy and whole-school approaches to formative assessment. Staff are encouraged and empowered to take forward small tests of change. In moving forward, it is important for staff to develop their skills in evaluating the impact of their work and initiatives on improving outcomes for children.
- Senior leaders acknowledge the need for a more developed approach to 'Developing the Young Workforce' (DYW) across the school, to ensure that all children receive their entitlements within the 'Careers Education Standard'.
- Senior leaders and staff have begun to engage with 'How good is OUR school?' (2018) to increase children's participation in the life and work of the school. Children should build on their experience of leading improvements in the playground to leading aspects of learning and teaching.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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

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

- Senior leaders and staff have created a calm, purposeful and inclusive learning environment. Children feel valued, supported and encouraged to do their best. There is a strong commitment to the school's values, and a focus on promoting positive and respectful relationships between staff, children and their peers. Almost all children believe that they can learn from their mistakes. This focus supports most children to embrace challenge and adopt a 'have a go' attitude to learning. The majority of children talk about being 'in the pit' when learning is difficult. Across the school, all classes display agreed strategies which children can use when they are 'stuck' in their learning. In most classes, staff and children refer increasingly to these strategies during the course of lessons.
- In all lessons, teachers share the steps to success and in a minority of lessons, children help to create them. Overall, children can talk about what they are learning. In most lessons, children engage well in their learning. They work independently, in pairs and in small groups and enjoy opportunities to share ideas and collaborate. In most classes, children have a chance to influence the direction of aspects of their learning, mainly through interdisciplinary learning. Children now need greater opportunities to lead their own learning. In younger classes, children have opportunities to learn through play. Senior leaders should work with staff across early level to build on and develop this practice further. In all classes, children reflect regularly on their learning. In a few classes, children's reflections link to learning targets or feedback from peers and staff. This supports children to chart confidently the progress they are making.
- There are clear expectations of the learning environment and ethos in each class. Most teachers use agreed lesson structures and vocabulary well to support a shared language of learning, the 'Southesk patter'. Senior leaders and staff work together to share good practice and improve children's learning experiences. This is increasing the consistency of learning and teaching across the school. In the best examples, this leads to high quality, differentiated and engaging learning opportunities which promote children's creativity and higher order thinking skills. Teachers should continue to develop approaches to planning appropriately differentiated tasks to ensure that all children make the best progress possible.
- Children have opportunities to learn outdoors in the school's wildlife garden. They make good use of the local community to enhance their learning. Teachers should continue to make learning relevant to the children of Southesk, developing further children's sense of place as they engage with their surroundings. Staff make good use of the digital technology available to enhance learning and provide additional support for children with barriers to their learning. Senior leaders are increasing further the range of digital technology available to develop children's digital literacy skills progressively.
- Children have regular opportunities across the school to develop a range of skills. Older children train to become sports leaders or peer mediators to support and engage younger

children in the playground. Pupil focus groups and the pupil forum provide mechanisms for children to participate in evaluating the work of the school. They contribute to identifying areas for improvement. Senior leaders and staff gather children's feedback on a range of key themes across the school to inform planning for further improvement.

- Teachers use a range of assessment approaches to gather evidence of children's learning. This includes identified core assessment tasks in literacy and numeracy from nursery to P7. Senior leaders and staff are beginning to develop high quality assessments which require children to apply their learning in new and relevant contexts. In most lessons, formative assessment supports learning well in literacy. These approaches should now extend to other curricular areas. The school's scales for effort and understanding are on display in each class. Most children use these regularly throughout the day, and to reflect on their learning each week.
- All teachers plan for learning across all curricular areas over a range of timescales. Progression pathways support teachers' planning for almost all curricular areas. Clear links to developing skills are evident in the pathways for literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and religious and moral education. The headteacher should continue to support teachers' use of the pathways to identify gaps in children's learning, and to plan appropriate next steps. Teachers should continue to develop responsive practice during lessons to ensure an appropriate pace of learning for all children.
- Senior leaders and teachers are beginning to develop a shared understanding of progress and achievement within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. A range of moderation activities is evident in the collegiate calendar to support this. Staff should continue to work together within and across CfE levels, and with colleagues from other local schools to ensure attainment data is valid and reliable. This will build teachers' confidence in measuring children's progress and the impact of interventions.
- Senior leaders meet with teachers three times a year to monitor and evaluate children's progress. Teachers track CfE levels three times a year using a five point scale to indicate levels of support and challenge. Teachers are beginning to gain confidence in their own professional judgements. Staff use effectively their knowledge of children and families to identify appropriate strategies and interventions when children are not making expected progress. Senior leaders are introducing an electronic tracking system to support teachers further in raising attainment and improving outcomes for all children.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers collaborate to develop progression pathways for all aspects of literacy linked to skills for learning, life and work. Skills progressively increase in complexity within each level. Clear expectations and guidance for teachers support the development of effective teaching approaches within literacy lessons and the development of literacy across the curriculum.
- Staff use Angus Council's mathematics and numeracy progression pathways and a core commercial scheme to support continuous progress for children in mathematics and numeracy.
- The school's health and wellbeing (HWB) progression pathway identifies skills and has links to the wellbeing indicators. It reinforces this area of the curriculum as a responsibility for all staff. Examples of good practice and suggested resources support further teachers' planning of HWB. This pathway should now support more rigorous monitoring and tracking of children's progress in HWB. Teachers should use the skills-focused progression pathway for Physical Education (PE) to plan responsively to track children's progress, and identify clearly their next steps in learning. Senior leaders should ensure all children receive consistently two hours of quality PE every week.
- Experiences and outcomes are bundled for social studies, technologies and science over three years for each level. Topics linked to these also include aspects of expressive arts. Staff should develop further approaches to cross curricular and interdisciplinary learning using the unique context of the school. There is a progressive programme for French from P1 to P7. The school should continue with the introduction of Spanish as a second language from P5 onwards.
- The headteacher recognises the need to review and refresh the curriculum. It is important that the resulting updated curriculum rationale links all four contexts for learning meaningfully and progressively for all children. It is also important that identified skills for learning, life and work and links to the 'Careers Education Standard (3-18)' permeate children's learning experiences across the curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The school works well with the wider community to build positive and productive partnerships based on a shared vision. This has led to a strong ethos of trust. Relationships between parents, partners and the school are a key strength of the school. The headteacher knows the school community well and makes effective use of a range of partners to ensure that they meet the needs of children and their families. Parents report that they are welcomed warmly and treated with respect.
- There are a number of initiatives which support families, made possible through the use of the Pupil Equity Fund. For example, parents evaluate positively the newly established family learning lounge used for 'Learn, Laugh, Play'. The adult learning drop-in sessions also help parents to develop skills for learning, life and work and increase their confidence levels. A drop-in coffee session allows parents to get together to discuss common issues. A large number of diverse partner agencies offer support and advice to parents, including the local authority's Communities Team. Parents are appreciative of the support provided to mitigate against financial hardship. The school piloted a holiday voucher club for families entitled to free school meals to support with the cost of lunches during holiday periods. Parents evaluated this initiative very highly and valued the input from the welfare rights officer.
- The majority of parents report that they receive helpful, regular feedback about how their child is learning and developing. They are responding well to being able to access what their child is learning through trialled use of an interactive digital platform, as well as attendance at assemblies and learning afternoons.

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

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

- Senior leaders recognise that positive relationships are central to a whole school approach to wellbeing. Work on developing reflective conversations, using 'I messages' and 'You Messages', coupled with 'This Is How We Do It Here', characterise interactions across the school. Staff reference appropriate and supportive language with children which is helping to build strong relational trust. This results in almost all children confirming that they have someone with whom to talk should they have concerns. They have a strong sense of security at school. Staff attune to the needs of children and their readiness to learn through a range of emotional check-ins.
- The move from punitive measures to developing positive relationships is also supporting a nurturing ethos and climate at Southesk. This is having a positive impact, evidenced through the reduction in the number of behavioural concerns and low rates of exclusion. Teachers' work on restorative practice is encouraging children to resolve and learn from conflict in a way which maintains positive relationships. As a result, children are managing their emotions more skilfully and reflecting on their behaviour.
- Children have positive relationships with staff and their peers. This is supporting their wellbeing. Staff should continue to work with children who demonstrate behaviour that does not reflect the school values. Children receive individual support and pastoral care from their class teachers and school pupil support assistants (SPSAs), who know and understand them well. This enhances children's wellbeing. This results in the strong sense of inclusion and belonging that children feel at Southesk. There is a need to carefully consider the balance of care and challenge so that children are developing their skills of resilience more effectively.
- The school is well placed to build on this strong foundation by developing a shared approach to using wellbeing indicators. Although children know what the wellbeing indicators are, they are not yet using them to assess their strengths and areas for improvement in wellbeing. As a result, they are not aware of their progress in wellbeing.
- There are a number of successful initiatives aimed at those with barriers to learning. Parents whose children attend the nurture room value the 'lighthouse'. There is evidence of the progress a few children have made in their readiness to learn through their attendance. Other examples include partnership working that supports individual children to feel included in the life and work of the school. Senior leaders need to align more closely the diverse range of interventions to ensure coherence of support. Interventions should be monitored and evaluated more rigorously to demonstrate improvements in outcomes for children.
- Children do not have a good understanding of the world of work and are not confident in describing the skills needed for different jobs in the community. In relation to physical activity

and health, children are able to suggest different ways of being active and the positive effects this can have on their health. Their understanding of the interrelationship of daily activity, diet, rest and sleep on their wellbeing is limited.

- Children who require additional support have their needs identified well. Staff are skilled at gathering information and identifying children's needs, with specialist services and colleagues when required. A comprehensive overview of children who require additional support in their learning is in place for all staff. Those children who have additional support plans have clear measurable targets. These are monitored and evaluated regularly. These should then inform future targets.
- Senior leaders, through their analysis of reported issues, are responsive to incidents of inequality. They have strong approaches to partnership working that result in external partners contributing to the health and wellbeing programme. Senior leaders are aware of the need to promote learning about equality and diversity across the school. Children's understanding of equality, prejudice and diversity is not well developed. In moving forward, senior leaders should review and evaluate the impact of provision on children's understanding of equality and diversity.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

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

- Attainment data was provided by the school for session 2018/2019. Senior leaders recognise that attainment data is not yet reliable and does not accurately reflect children's attainment. Raising attainment in literacy and numeracy should remain a priority.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Most children are making good progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Overall, attainment in listening and talking is satisfactory. Across the school, most children are confident when speaking to adults and peers. Most children listen well to their teacher and respond appropriately to questions during lessons. At first level, a minority of children talk over each other in groups and require support to take turns when listening and talking in groups. At second level, the majority of children listen well during discussions and a few build successfully on previous contributions. A few children do not yet apply their learning in listening and talking to different contexts across the school.

Reading

- Overall, attainment and progress in reading is good. Across the school, most children enjoy reading or listening to stories. The majority of children talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors or books. At early level, most children identify initial single sounds with growing confidence and the majority recognise and can blend simple sounds. At first level, most children use a range of strategies to decode unfamiliar words. They explain clearly the difference between fiction and non-fiction, but are not yet skilled at finding the main ideas of a text. At second level, most children skim and scan texts for information. They are less confident in answering inferential questions or discussing whether sources of information are reliable.

Writing

- Overall, children's progress in writing is good. At early level, most children attempt to write independently. They write regularly to convey feelings and personal experiences. At first level, most children use simple punctuation appropriately in their writing. They use increasingly interesting vocabulary to make their writing more engaging for the reader. By second level, the majority of children write persuasively, presenting two sides of an argument. They explore the structures and features of different styles of writing. They do not write at length often enough. Across the school, children need to write for a wider range of purposes, audiences and real-life contexts.

Maths and numeracy

- Overall, children's progress in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. Across the school, children need to deepen their knowledge and understanding by applying it to a wider range of contexts in mathematics and numeracy and across the curriculum.

Number, money and measure

- Most children at early level work with numbers to 10 and can apply this understanding to real-life contexts. They use the language of measure to compare weights, lengths and heights with increasing confidence. A minority of children at first level use a range of strategies to solve number problems. They are less confident when applying these skills to problems involving fractions, money and measure. Most children can display digital time using am and pm correctly, but are not confident when telling times from analogue clocks. Most children at second level know multiplication table facts. They apply this knowledge to solve two digit multiplication problems using written methods. They need to develop a better understanding of number and place value so that they use and apply strategies more flexibly.

Shape position and movement

- Children at early level create symmetrical patterns. They use positional language to explain to others where an object is. Children at first level explain the properties of a few two-dimensional objects and three-dimensional shapes. They need to apply and deepen their understanding through practical learning activities. Most children at second level know the points of a compass. They need to solve problems that link this knowledge to directions, angles and turns in real life contexts.

Information handling

- At the early level, most children match and sort objects through play. Older children talk about graphs they have seen. In a few classes, they interpret graphical data that shows their progress in learning. Children need opportunities to collect, organise, display and interpret data for relevant purposes across all curricular areas using technology as appropriate. Children need to use the language of probability to talk about the likelihood of events happening and to apply this to relevant contexts.

Attainment over time

- The school provided data for the past four years which indicates a steady decrease in attainment for literacy and numeracy. Predictions indicate this trend will continue this year. The data provided is not yet robust enough to be used to measure attainment over time across the curriculum. However, evidence for individual children demonstrates that, year-on-year, almost all make progress from prior levels of learning.

Overall quality of achievement

- Children achieve well across a range of contexts and are proud of their achievements. They participate in a range of clubs such as dance, crafts, School of Football and competitions such as the 'S Factor' and 'Scots poetry'. This is helping them to develop their fitness levels, performance skills and confidence levels. Children are also developing valuable skills as they embrace leadership opportunities such as sports leaders. The approach taken to recognising and celebrating success centres on intrinsic motivation. The 'jar of good choices' and 'over and above awards' recognise behaviours and actions beyond school expectations and are raising aspirations for most children.
- The school has made an early start to recording participation in wider school activities and clubs with a view to putting in place measures for those at risk of missing out. Children are not yet confident in discussing the skills or attributes they gain through their participation. The school should extend their approaches to recording children's achievements to include

tracking the skills and attributes that children acquire progressively across the totality of their learning, in and out of school.

Equity

- All staff and partners demonstrate a clear understanding of the socio economic background of all children and seek to provide appropriate supports to address individual children's needs. The principal teacher, appointed using Pupil Equity Funding, has a focus on developing family learning and parental engagement. There are a number of emerging initiatives that are having a positive impact on individual families. There is emerging evidence that such interventions are having a positive impact on children's learning experiences. Senior leaders have made a promising start to evaluating the impact of approaches to promoting equity.

School Empowerment

■ Empowering teachers to lead with a focus on improvement

- The headteacher has created successfully a culture of empowerment in the school. Staff feel well supported and increasingly confident to take ownership of aspects of change and improvement. Staff value the flexibility and autonomy afforded to them to lead areas of particular interest or relevance to their class. There is a collaborative approach to professional reading and a collective interest in current research and guidance. The headteacher prioritises time for professional dialogue and reflection. As a result, teachers feel better informed to plan and initiate small tests of change as part of their drive to improve the quality of provision and practice. High quality professional learning and professional review and development have been central to developing leadership at all levels.

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.