

Summarised inspection findings

Cultercullen School

Aberdeenshire Council

7 November 2023

Key contextual information

Cultercullen School is located in the hamlet of Cultercullen, close to Udney Station, in rural Aberdeenshire. The school was established in 1874 and is part of the Meldrum Community Schools Network.

Two headteachers job-share the post on a 0.6/0.4 full time equivalent basis. There are three class teachers and both headteachers also have a teaching commitment. Children are supported in class by two Pupil Support Assistants.

The current roll is 46 children across three mixed stage classes. Most of the children who attend the school reside in decile seven of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

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 headteachers and staff have established a warm and caring ethos within Cultercullen School. The team are enthusiastic, supportive and highly committed to securing the best possible outcomes for children. They have a clear understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of their local community. The headteachers and staff have effective processes for communicating with all stakeholders. Children, parents and partners feel included, respected and valued.
- The whole school community has worked in partnership together to create their refreshed vision, values and aims post-pandemic. This development was led successfully by children in the learning council. The values (fun, respectful, inclusive, eco, nurturing, determined and supportive) are visible and enacted in many aspects of school life. Children can speak about them in detail and understand why they are important.
- The headteachers have a reflective and responsive approach to leadership of change. They are keen to embrace new ideas and approaches and are committed to continuous improvement. The headteachers involve effectively the whole school community in taking forward areas of improvement. Moving forward, the headteachers now need to take a more strategic approach to evaluating aspects of the school's work. This will help them to assess the extent to which development work has been embedded and identify the areas where further improvement is required. There is a need to make more informed decisions about the deployment of staff and the balance of the curriculum.
- The headteachers use their knowledge of children and families well to identify appropriate interventions and resources that will promote wellbeing and increase attainment. They consult with staff, children and parents about the proposed use of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) and other additional funding. They seek feedback on the success of interventions. The headteachers should now consider how they can use data more effectively to detail the

required improvements and set clear measures of success. This will help them to evidence more clearly the extent to which interventions are helping to close the attainment gap.

- The headteachers use current research about learning and teaching to inform their planning for improvement and change. When addressing areas for improvement, they consider new ideas and theories as part of their approach. They adopt or adapt these as appropriate. They offer appropriate professional learning to staff before and during implementation.
- The headteachers have implemented a quality assurance calendar to support them to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. They should now agree on a more systematic process for identifying the focus for classroom observations and reviewing progress.
- All teachers lead aspects of improvement well and strive to develop their individual and collective skills for the benefit of children. They engage in professional enquiry and career-long professional learning to support their knowledge and understanding of aspects of learning and teaching. This includes areas such as play pedagogy and writing. They share their skills and knowledge with colleagues to help build capacity within the team. This is having a positive impact on children's learning.
- Teachers support children to lead and improve the work of the school through their mentorship of the pupil leadership groups. All children from P1-P7 are members of one of four leadership groups. Each group has a clearly defined remit and specific responsibilities. Children can articulate well the role that they play in improving their school. They provide evaluative feedback on school issues and take forward action plans. They help to promote important topics such as children's rights, environmental change, charitable causes and pupil wellbeing. The pupil leadership groups exemplify the overall culture of the school, which puts children at the centre of all improvement work.
- Support staff take on leadership of specific initiatives that support wellbeing and learning. As a next step, the headteachers should provide increased training opportunities and involve support staff more fully in the planning and evaluation of this work. This will help to develop further leadership capacity within the staff team.
- The majority of families attend meetings held by the Parent Council, known as the 'Friends of Cultercullen'. The response rate to questionnaires and surveys is very high. Parents are influential in instigating improvements and regularly give evaluative feedback on the work of the school. Almost all feel comfortable approaching staff with questions or ideas and most feel that their views are taken into account.

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

- Children are polite, responsive and welcoming to visitors. Relationships between children, and between children and staff, across Cultercullen School are very positive. Children are proud of their school and its community and talk with enthusiasm about their experiences. All staff know children well and prioritise their wellbeing. This is conducive to a calm, nurturing and relaxed environment where children feel safe and valued.
- Almost all children are engaged and interact well during lessons. They work successfully in small groups and are confident and independent learners. Children listen carefully to instructions and are eager to take part in activities. Most lessons are appropriately matched to children's abilities. Teachers should now ensure that all learning experiences are suitably paced and appropriately differentiated to offer sufficient challenge and meet the varied needs of all learners. This will help to create a greater range of opportunities for all children to lead, apply and develop their learning in different contexts. Teachers should also ensure that they maximise all available learning time throughout the school day and support smooth and timely transitions within and between activities. This will help children to make progress in their learning.
- In all classes, teachers provide clear direction and instructions. They offer children ongoing support and guidance during the course of lessons. In almost all lessons, teachers share and revisit the purpose of learning and provide explanations that support children's understanding of their progress. In most lessons, children know how they will achieve success. Teachers should continue to build on this effective practice and develop further children's skill and ability to identify how they can be successful in their learning.
- Across the school, learners experience a broad range of learning opportunities, both in the classroom and outdoors within the school grounds and the local environment. For example, staff and children have worked closely with a local group to develop the community garden. This has offered all children the opportunity to learn more about sustainability and grow their own food.
- Children in P1 benefit from regular and well-considered opportunities to learn through play in a stimulating and well-resourced learning environment. Adults support them well through effective interactions. This approach helps children to develop social skills, independence and creativity. Teachers across the rest of the school have also made a positive start to developing play based approaches. They should continue to engage with national practice guidance and research relating to play pedagogy. This will support them to develop a deeper understanding of play-based learning and the role of the adult. It will also help them to plan motivating and meaningful learning experiences. These should be developmentally appropriate and provide appropriate levels of challenge for all children.

- In all classes, teachers use digital technology effectively to enhance learning. For example, they share learning prompts and activities on interactive boards. Across all stages, children confidently use a variety of digital tools independently, such as online applications, tablets and programmable devices. This approach motivates and engages children in their learning.
- The headteachers and teachers agree annually an assessment calendar. This includes a wide range of planned summative, standardised and ongoing assessments in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers also plan and use well a range of formative assessment strategies. They use the robust and detailed information gathered to support their professional judgement on progress and attainment. This helps teachers to plan children's next steps in learning. Moving forward, the headteachers should ensure that approaches to assessment are manageable, proportionate and clearly linked to planned learning.
- Teachers engage in helpful moderation activities in school and with other local schools. This is supporting them to make accurate judgements about children's progress and attainment. As planned, teachers should continue to seek opportunities to moderate with colleagues. This will help to develop further their shared understanding of expected national standards across all areas of the curriculum.
- All children engage in self- and peer-assessment in writing. Almost all are able to talk confidently about their strengths and what they need to do to improve. Teachers provide helpful feedback to learners which supports them in evaluating their progress towards, and achievement of, their individual writing targets. Children are well-placed to take a greater role in leading their own learning, and supporting that of their peers, in other curricular areas.
- Teachers plan across the curriculum to meet the needs of different groups of children. They use progression pathways in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, French, religious and moral education and science. Teachers should now make greater use of progression pathways to plan for all areas of the curriculum. The headteachers and teachers have rightly identified the need to evaluate approaches to planning. They should work together to develop effective and efficient planning processes for all curricular areas and all timescales. There is a need for planning to be streamlined, proportionate and clearly identify what is to be learned and how it will be assessed.
- Teachers meet with the headteachers each term to discuss children's progress and attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The purpose of these meetings is to check whether children are on track and identify those needing support. They use an individual tracking system to capture every child's progress and identify any support needs. These professional discussions are informed by a range of assessment data. The headteachers should now work with teachers to use the data gathered more effectively to evaluate the success of planned support and targeted interventions. This will help them to ensure improved outcomes for learners, including those with additional needs and those impacted negatively by socio-economic factors.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The headteachers, teachers and children have created a curriculum rationale, which reflects the vision, values and aims of the school and its community. All stakeholders evaluate the curriculum rationale annually to support the planning of school improvement. Teachers make use of progression pathways based on Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes to plan for most areas of the curriculum. Senior leaders and teachers have correctly identified the need to introduce progression pathways across all areas of the curriculum.
- There is a whole school approach to outdoor learning which includes learning about the outdoors and using the outdoors to enhance learning and teaching experiences. This is integral to the weekly planning for every class. Protected time, for example Muddy Monday, Welly Wednesday and Fresh Air Friday, ensures that children have the opportunity to experience learning outdoors within the school grounds and the community garden.
- Teachers use the four contexts for learning to plan learning experiences. The headteachers and teachers should now use national and local guidance to develop further their understanding of effective interdisciplinary learning.
- Children receive their entitlement to religious education and teachers plan for this using a progression framework. All children across the school learn French in a planned and progressive way. In line with national guidance, children in P5, P6 and P7 have the opportunity to learn a third language. In consultation with all stakeholders, children learn Spanish as their third language.
- All children across the school receive two hours of quality physical education with teachers using both the indoor and outdoor environment to enhance learning and teaching.
- The school, working in partnership with the 'Friends of Cultercullen' and Aberdeenshire's library service, have recently secured new books to enhance the library provision. Subsequently, children benefit from a well-resourced library which is used effectively to promote reading for enjoyment. As a next step, the staff should ensure that the range of books available help to support the children's understanding of important issues such as diversity and inclusion.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The headteachers have an open door policy and prioritise relationships with children and their families. They have created a strong sense of community and partnership working with parents, local residents, partner agencies and other organisations. This is helping to improve outcomes for children. All staff understand the significant role of the school in the life of the local community. Feedback from partners and other organisations indicates strong and effective relationships with the school.
- The headteachers consistently involve parents in shaping school policy and planning for school improvement. For example, staff have reviewed and developed systems and processes for reporting to parents to better reflect parents' views on effective reporting procedures. The 'Friends of Cultercullen' effectively represent parents at regular meetings with the headteachers. They provide funding for resources and activities which support and enhance learning 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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

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

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- All staff at the school know the children very well and demonstrate kindness, sensitivity and care in their interactions with them. They understand the range of needs that individual children have and respond effectively. Almost all children report that they feel safe at school. Most feel that staff and other children treat them fairly and with respect.
- Teachers deliver a progressive health and wellbeing curriculum that is based on the experiences and outcomes in CfE. They engage purposefully in career-long professional learning that is related to this area of the curriculum. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident and skilled at supporting children's knowledge and understanding. As a result, children across the school are learning successfully about health and wellbeing.
- Children are developing their understanding of the wellbeing indicators. The pupil learning council has worked with teachers to introduce a new approach to highlighting and exploring each indicator through assemblies, surveys, lessons and displays. This work is at an early stage but is already having a positive impact on children's understanding of wellbeing. Teachers have a bi-annual discussion with every child around the wellbeing indicators. They also have regular informal conversations to respond to needs that arise. They take prompt action to address any concerns raised. Almost all children feel that they have someone to speak to about any worries they may have.
- The headteachers monitor closely attendance and punctuality. They address concerns in a timely manner and take steps to successfully support children and families to improve attendance where required. In recent years, the school's attendance has been in line with, or above, the national average and there have not been any exclusions.
- Most children report that they have either not experienced bullying or feel that it is managed appropriately. The school has not recorded any instances of bullying behaviour in the current or previous session. The headteachers plan to develop a positive relationships policy in partnership with the whole school community. They now need to ensure that children are well-informed about bullying and know how to recognise it and respond. The headteachers should record all concerns in relation to bullying in accordance with local and national guidance.
- The headteachers are aware of their statutory duties associated with supporting children who have additional support needs. This includes those who are care experienced. They are proactive in seeking advice from the local authority when issues or concerns arise.
- 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. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

- The school has been awarded bronze accreditation from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its work on promoting and respecting the rights of children. The rights respecting group are now leading the school's efforts to secure the silver award. All classes have a class charter and children are confident and knowledgeable when speaking about their own rights and those of others. They can make direct links between their rights and everyday situations in school and beyond. The headteachers have correctly identified that there is a need to develop further children's understanding of diversity and inclusion.
- The headteachers work effectively with teachers and partner agencies to meet the identified needs of children. They initiate prompt and positive action that supports children and their families. This includes those who require additional support in learning, have issues related to their health or are affected by their socio-economic situation. Moving forward, the headteachers should develop a more systematic method of collating and analysing information related to inclusion and equality. They should also develop more robust approaches to monitoring the effectiveness of interventions that are put in place to assist children with identified needs.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Due to the size of the school, overall statements have been made when reporting on attainment and progress. This protects the anonymity of individual children.
- In June 2023, most children across P1, P4 and P7 achieved expected levels of attainment in reading and talking and listening. The majority achieved in writing. A minority of children exceeded national expectations in literacy. Most children across P1, P4 and P7 achieved expected levels of attainment in numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English is good. Most children across the whole school are making good progress in reading and listening and talking. The majority are making good progress in writing. A few children are making very good progress in literacy and English. A minority of children are capable of achieving beyond national expectations in literacy and English, particularly in reading. These children require more challenge in their learning.
- A minority of children who require additional support with aspects of literacy and English are making good or very good progress from prior levels of attainment.

Listening and talking

- Children who have achieved early level can listen and respond well to others and follow instructions. They share their ideas, thoughts and feelings enthusiastically within small group and whole class discussions. Children who have achieved first level communicate effectively, take turns and contribute at an appropriate time when engaging with others for a range of purpose. Children who are on track to achieve second level build on the contributions of others well. They can identify the difference between fact and opinion with appropriate explanation. Across the school, almost all children talk confidently to adults about their learning.

Reading

- Children who have achieved early level can recognise, say and write individual and blended sounds. They can detect and produce rhyme and can read aloud a familiar text with confidence. Children who have achieved first level can read aloud with expression and fluency. They answer questions to show their understanding. They know the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts and can determine fact from opinion. Children who are on track to achieve second level are enthusiastic about reading. They talk confidently about their favourite genre of book and justify their choice. Children can discuss the author's technique and word choice. They comment appropriately on how this can influence a reader. They can confidently identify strategies to support them in analysing text.

Writing

- Children who have achieved early level can write simple sentences using capital letters and full stops. They can identify lower and upper case letters and mark-make through play. Children who have achieved first level can use relevant and interesting vocabulary appropriate to their audience and can write for a variety of purposes. They can use common conjunctions. They now need to develop the ability to use more sophisticated vocabulary in their writing. Children who are on track to achieve second level can use paragraphs well across a range of genre. They use a range of punctuation accurately. They now need increased opportunities to write across the curriculum to consolidate their existing skills.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most children across the school are making good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are making very good progress.
- A minority of children who require additional support with aspects of numeracy and mathematics are making good or very good progress from prior levels of attainment.

Number, money and measure

- Children who have achieved early level can count on and back from a given number and recognise odds and evens. They can solve problems involving addition and subtraction and use the language of measure appropriately. They now need support to develop further their understanding of money and ability to share amounts equally. Children who have achieved first level are confident when estimating amounts and completing calculations involving addition and subtraction. They need more practice in using multiplication facts to solve problems and in selecting coins to make a given amount. They can convert hours to minutes but need to develop their knowledge of units of measurement involving length and volume. Children who are on track to achieve second level have a secure understanding of place value and can convert fractions to percentages and decimals. They are confident when working out profit and can successfully measure area and perimeter. They need to develop their skills in multiplying two-digit numbers, completing two-step problems and in calculating time, speed and distance.

Shape, position and movement

- Children who have achieved early level can identify common two-dimensional shapes and categorise them by size, colour and other properties. They are confident to continue and create increasingly complex patterns using shapes. Children who have achieved first level can identify the properties of three-dimensional objects and are confident to explain and show lines of symmetry in common shapes. They need to develop their understanding of angles. Children who are on track to achieve second level can identify three-dimensional objects and draw the associated nets. They can distinguish between different angles, such as those which are obtuse and acute. They should now develop further their knowledge of a wider range of angles.

Information handling

- Children who have achieved early level understand and use information within their own environment. They can explain the purpose of signs and labels and answer questions about information presented in different formats. Children who have achieved first level can extract information from a pictograph but require support to create questions for others. They need to develop their knowledge of the range of ways that data can be collected. Children who are on track to achieve second level can interpret data and display it in an alternative format. They need to improve their understanding of the range and features of various formats that are used to present information.

Attainment over time

- The small number of pupils and the fluctuating roll results in percentages at key stages not always accurately representing trends in attainment. The headteachers track attainment in literacy and numeracy for each cohort of children over time. This data shows that attainment has increased, or remained constant, within most cohorts across the whole school. Senior leaders and teachers should now begin to track children's progress across all areas of the curriculum.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff seek and provide opportunities for wider achievement. Children share and celebrate personal achievements from both within and outwith school at weekly assemblies. They receive certificates for demonstrating the four capacities of CfE. Staff track and display children's wider achievements and, as a result, children are aware and proud of their successes. They feel that staff and peers value their achievements.
- All children exercise responsibility and contribute to the life of the school and wider community through leadership groups. Their views and actions have influenced positive changes within their school. Children participating in leadership groups are able to explain the ways in which these roles have helped to improve their school and its community. They understand that their leadership roles are helping them to develop their own skills for learning, life and work.

Equity for all learners

- The headteachers and staff at Cultercullen School recognise that the current economic climate has impacted on the local community. In response to this, they have taken positive action to reduce the cost of the school day. This includes partially or fully funding trips through fundraising initiatives or grant applications. They have also introduced a uniform recycling service. The headteachers proactively signpost sources of support for families that may require financial assistance. Subsequently, children and families receive the help they require and have increased equity of opportunity. The headteachers are taking steps to ensure that the whole school community develops further a shared understanding of the importance of promoting equity within the local context.
- The school uses funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge, including PEF, to finance a range of interventions. These include a cooking club, an online numeracy resource, additional support for writing and a breakfast club. The headteachers have an appropriate rationale for the selection of these areas, based on attainment information and their knowledge of children and families. They now need to gather robust data to track and evidence the impact of all interventions. This will enable them to demonstrate clearly the extent to which interventions support wellbeing and accelerate the progress of children who are adversely affected by their socio-economic circumstances.

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.