Summarised inspection findings

St Thomas' RC Primary School

Angus Council

21 May 2024

Key contextual information

St Thomas' Primary School is a denominational primary school situated within a shared campus alongside Hayshead Primary School in Arbroath. The campus opened in 2020. There are currently 102 children in the school organised across five composite classes. The headteacher has been in post since 2020 and is supported by an acting principal teacher. Children from 20 nationalities attend the school and 19 languages are spoken. Seventy children have English as an additional language. Around a quarter of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2. Just under half reside in deciles 3 & 4 and 30% reside in deciles 5-7. Attendance is in line with the national average and there have been no exclusions this session. The headteacher has recently finished a period of acting headteacher of another school in addition to St Thomas' Primary School.

The nursery was not inspected as part of this inspection.

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	

■ Staff and children have a strong faith which underpins daily interactions between children and adults across the school. The headteacher reviews annually the shared school values of faith, kindness, learning and respect with pupils, parents and wider community. Their vision of 'Strive to Thrive' is well established within the school community. Most children exemplify the gospel values in their relationships, showing care and respect for one another. Parents value the strong partnership between the school and the Parish. They feel able to approach staff at school about their child's wellbeing and learning and are confident they will be supported to resolve any concerns. All staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic context of children and families which enables them to provide sensitive support. This includes signposting families to appropriate support and planning targeted interventions in partnership with a range of partners.

■ Children represent 20 different nationalities and speak 19 languages. Children and staff celebrate this and share proudly their culture, heritage and beliefs with each other. They demonstrate a strong sense of belonging, which was recently celebrated at a well-attended cultural celebration day which the children and parents helped to organise.

■ Senior leaders have developed a quality assurance calendar which ensures time for all staff to regularly evaluate progress towards agreed school improvement priorities. School improvement priorities are aligned well to self-evaluation. Senior leaders amend plans in response to professional discussion to meet the needs of children and staff. This includes the current focus by staff on providing high quality learning and teaching of writing. Staff rightly identified a need to improve attainment in writing. Teachers identified writing as an area where they were less confident in supporting the range of needs across the school. Staff participated in effective professional learning to support the introduction of a new approach to teaching

writing. Teachers continue to engage in further training to ensure a consistent approach is implemented successfully across the school. All teachers are now more confident in delivering learning in this area and children are more motivated to write. This approach is beginning to impact positively on most children's writing across the school.

- All teachers are reflective practitioners and support each other effectively to improve and develop their practice. They have leadership roles including numeracy champion and digital leader. They attend local authority professional learning linked to their areas of leadership. Teachers share practice, knowledge and resources formally and informally. This is building teacher confidence in leading aspects of the curriculum and strengthening improvements in learning and teaching across the school. Senior leaders should continue to build on this successful collaborative approach to empower teachers further to extend their leadership skills.

- Senior leaders have prioritised implementing a more robust approach to the use of data this session. This includes for example, the use of SIMD, wellbeing and attainment data to support teachers to understand more clearly children's strengths, barriers to learning and progress. Teachers and senior leaders meet three times a year to discuss the progress children make in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. This helps teachers to plan appropriate support and challenge for most learners. Senior leaders plan interventions and bespoke support for identified children as a result of these meetings. Senior leaders should continue to build on this process. They should evidence and track more clearly the progress children receiving interventions make. This will be important particularly for learners impacted by adverse circumstances who have gaps in learning.

- Senior leaders and teachers have established pupil leadership groups. These include Eco committee, house captains, digi leaders and pupil council. Currently, a minority of pupils have leadership responsibilities across the school. The Eco committee has successfully achieved the school's first green flag. Digi leaders run a successful coding club and have plans to train teachers on the use of new digital applications. Most children who are part of leadership groups are beginning to understand their role in shaping school priorities and impacting change. However, this work is at an early stage. As planned, senior leaders should now ensure that all children have more regular and meaningful opportunities to be included in leadership roles and school improvement.

- Parents and pupils are consulted about the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Stakeholders agreed on the benefits of improving children's access to digital technology. As a result, PEF is primarily used to fund improved access to digital technology. All children in P4-7 have access to their own device and younger children have improved access to digital technology. This is helping to motivate, enhance and extend children's learning. In P6/7, children are successfully trialling a partially digital classroom to improve engagement and support skills for future careers. Children value the flexibility the devices offer and the digital literacy skills and confidence they are developing.

- Senior leaders use PEF to buy resources and to employ support staff to deliver targeted nurture support for a group of children. They should now develop a more strategic approach to measuring the impact of PEF. Moving forward, they should review data to improve their understanding of gaps in learning for children impacted by poverty. As they develop more robust approaches to measuring the impact of interventions this will support them to better evidence how they are accelerating the closing of gaps in learning.

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 and staff across the school have worked together to create a very inclusive, caring ethos deep-rooted within the Catholic faith. Children across the school experience very positive relationships. As a result, children are motivated to learn and confident to talk about their learning.

■   Children and staff are guided well by the values of faith, kindness, learning and respect and the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland. Children are developing their ability to articulate how these values guide their actions and words, with the support of adults and partners. Almost all children behave well and engage positively in learning. In a few lessons, teachers refer to the school values to encourage a few children to engage fully in learning. This helps children to understand more clearly expectations of behaviour during activities.

■   In most lessons, children engage well with learning. Children's engagement is improved when the pace of learning is brisk and combined with well-balanced, appropriately challenging learning experiences. Staff use questioning effectively to consolidate learning. They should now increase their use of questioning to support deeper thinking and learning, affording children opportunities to reason and analyse. Teachers have recently introduced worthwhile opportunities for children to lead learning through 'Breakthrough Projects' at P6 and P7. Children select topics which interest them to research or improve their knowledge and skills, for example, coding. Children enjoy presenting their learning to the class. Teachers should further develop this approach to increase challenge through application of higher order thinking skills.

■   Across all classes, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. This supports children to understand the purpose of learning and make connections to prior learning. Teachers are consistent in their approach to describing to children how they can be successful in learning. In a few classes, teachers co-construct success criteria with children and refer to these throughout lessons. This helps children to understand their individual strengths and next steps. As planned, teachers should continue to develop approaches to feedback to enable all learners to set their own targets in learning. As part of this, staff should ensure children have regular opportunities to revisit and act on feedback to review and develop their work.

■   Children and teachers use digital technology effectively across the school. Children enjoy taking an active role to promote the use of digital technology. They have made substantial progress and as a result, this is an area of strength across the school. Digital devices and tools are being used extensively to support learning. Children use digital technology with confidence and enthusiasm. For example, children in the upper stages use their digital skills well to create weekly learning round ups in the form of news broadcasts. Children are positive about how regular access to digital tools enhances their learning experiences and increases their independence. Staff and children work together to develop innovative ways to use digital technology to enrich learning at all stages and across the curriculum.

■ Staff at the early level have made a positive start to embedding play-based approaches, underpinned by national and local guidance. Staff have been proactive in visiting other settings to learn from others. This is supporting their review of the balance of adult-initiated and child-initiated activities to improve child-led learning further. They continue to reflect on how current approaches can be strengthened to increase challenge while responding to the interests and needs of children. Although children have access to a range of resources, there is opportunity to enhance the environment including access to outdoors. This should promote the development and transfer of early literacy and numeracy skills in an increased range of contexts.

■ Senior leaders and teachers have clear procedures in place to assess children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers are guided by a school wide assessment policy. Assessment is integral to professional reflection, dialogue and decision making. Teachers regularly analyse and evaluate assessment evidence to inform next steps in learning. As planned, senior leaders and teachers should now develop high-quality assessments. This will provide learners with opportunities to apply their learning across curriculum areas and in new and unfamiliar contexts. As a result, learners will better understand how their learning develops important transferable skills for learning, life and work.

■ Senior leaders and teachers meet throughout the year to track progress and discuss expectations for learners. As a result of these meetings, they plan interventions and amend planning for identified groups or individuals. Staff should continue to develop monitoring and tracking to ensure interventions have the expected impact for groups and individuals. This will support all children continue to maximise their progress, including children with gaps in learning due to adverse circumstances.

■ Teaching staff across the school engage in moderation activities. Teachers have reviewed children's work together to develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations. As planned, staff should moderate across a range of curricular areas and with other schools to strengthen further the current approach.

■ Staff have a shared understanding of planning which is clearly linked to the experiences and outcomes for all areas of the curriculum. Teachers use progression frameworks well to inform lesson content and coverage which builds on prior learning. This is helping all children to make good progress. Teachers should now expand opportunities for differentiation and individualisation and build this into planned learning activities. This will support all teachers to stretch and challenge the most able learners.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

■ Teachers make good use of progression pathways across all curriculum areas This helps children to build on what they already know. Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to review approaches to interdisciplinary learning. This will support children to make links and apply their learning across different curricular areas.

■ Teachers are developing outdoor learning well. They provide engaging opportunities for children to learn outdoors in the playground and forest areas. Children apply subject learning and develop investigation and problem-solving skills through outdoor learning. Senior leaders are planning further development of outdoor learning to improve understanding of sustainability. As this develops it will be important to consider how outdoor learning experiences are developed in a progressive way.

■ Staff are developing very positive relationships with a range of key partners and organisations. They use these connections to find opportunities for children to experience personal achievement. For example, through maths enterprise competitions or the reading schools award. Staff recognise that this needs to be captured within the curriculum. Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to establish a way of monitoring and discussing with children the skills they are developing through these experiences.

■ All classes receive two hours of quality physical education (PE) each week. As part of targeted support for wellbeing, children participate regularly in a wide range of planned physical activity, such as lunch and after school clubs. This supports children's physical and mental health.

■ To promote reading, teachers ensure a range of books are available throughout the classroom. Children have access to a shared library within the campus.

■ Across the school, children receive their entitlement to 1 + 2 languages.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

■ Staff have strong positive relationships with parents and recognise the importance of parents in promoting the ethos and Gospel values of the school. Parents have regular opportunities to participate in their children's learning, attainment, and achievement. They feel comfortable approaching staff with questions, suggestions, and issues. Staff communicate effectively with parents through the online journals and newsletters.

■ Parent helpers are involved in the life of the school through prayer groups and supporting the food hub. Parents and children organised a successful Celebrating Culture Day which celebrated the diversity of the school community.

■ Senior leaders track parental attendance and engagement at events. They use this information to inform and plan future opportunities for parents to engage in their child's learning. A recent family learning session on literacy was well attended and parents valued the approaches to supporting literacy that were shared. All parents attended the parent appointments for their child this session.

■ Senior leaders regularly involve parents in school improvement. Parents were involved recently in a consultation about the curriculum and changes to school uniform. The headteacher should continue to work with parents to re-establish a Parent Council to represent the parent voice in supporting school improvement priorities.

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

- All staff have developed trusting and respectful relationships with children. They know children very well as individuals. Almost all children feel safe and settled in school. Teachers use daily emotional check-ins well to support children to name and understand their emotions. Children talk with increasing confidence about how they are feeling. Staff and children use a consistent, shared language to talk about wellbeing. All children use this shared understanding to consider their feelings on a scale which is understood by all. Most children have someone they can speak to if they are upset or worried. Teachers follow up with appropriate support for any child who reports feeling upset or angry. For example, time in the 'den', time in a quiet space or time to talk with a trusted adult. This positive approach to children's wellbeing is helping most children to feel secure and engage successfully in learning. Children complete termly wellbeing wheels. Senior leaders analyse and review the information gathered. They share with teachers any relevant information to inform planned support. Senior leaders lead assemblies on themes which emerge from their analysis. This includes, for example, an assembly on inclusion to support all children to understand this term more clearly.

- Almost all parents believe school staff promote children's emotional wellbeing well and provide children with the support they need to be healthy. Parents believe school staff are approachable. They value the support staff offer to their children and families, for example, signposting them to support groups.

- Most children understand the wellbeing indicators well. As a result, they articulate confidently what it means to be healthy, active, safe and nurtured at St Thomas'. Children feel nurtured and are proud of the way they care for each other. A minority of children have opportunities to exercise responsibility and contribute to the life of the school through pupil groups and leadership roles. These include reading champions, pupil council representatives, and sports leaders. Sports leaders are developing leadership skills as they plan sports day and health week, supported by a teacher. Children are proud of the contributions the groups have made to the school. Children should now be given increased responsibility to lead these groups independently. They should record the work of the groups and report on progress to the school community.

- Children have many opportunities to be physically active through PE lessons, outdoor learning and a range of lunchtime and after school clubs provided by teachers, children and partners. For example, the afterschool 'glow' sports club is well attended by children in P1-4 and supported by active schools' leaders. Primary 7 digital leaders lead younger children in a coding club. Children value and enjoy the many opportunities they have to stay active and participate in clubs. Participation in clubs is recorded. Senior leaders should now track and monitor children's participation to identify any children at risk of missing out. They should ensure all children develop skills for learning, life and work.

- Staff are at the early stages of embedding children's rights into school life. They have developed helpful charters which support children to learn about rights and understand what they mean for them. Staff should continue, as planned, to develop this work, supporting children to have a more global understanding of children's rights and how rights impact their daily life.

- Senior leaders recognise the importance of staff wellbeing. They listen to and act on the views of staff, for example in the pace of change and school priorities. Staff value the support senior leaders provide to them, enabling them to carry out their role effectively. All staff support each other well, sharing resources and expertise to build capacity. Staff experience an ethos where they feel comfortable to develop professionally and reflect on practice.

- Teachers plan health and wellbeing learning experiences using progression frameworks. Children learn about how to keep their bodies healthy and how to stay safe. Older pupils are learning about neurodiversity. They discuss difference sensitively and understand that some children need additional resources and support to be successful in their learning. Teachers should continue to explore issues around discrimination, difference and diversity with children as part of the health and wellbeing learning offered.

- Senior leaders and teachers understand well how to meet statutory duties in regard to wellbeing, equality and inclusion. All staff follow clear staged intervention procedures to ensure children are identified for support quickly if required. Senior leaders guide staff to review universal approaches to support, for example, clear instructions and routines, consistent language and quiet spaces for children to access. Teachers plan further targeted interventions for children who need additional help with learning. A range of partners support staff very well to plan and carry out interventions to meet children's needs. This includes effective support for children for whom English is an additional language. Partners support identified children effectively to develop motor skills or speech and language. Children make positive progress as a result of this partnership approach. Senior leaders and staff have planned short term nurture sessions for identified children. Support staff skilfully help children to manage their emotions, co-regulate, self-regulate and engage better with learning.

- Children who require targeted support have detailed learner profiles. These help staff to know the strategies which best support children to be successful and review their progress. Senior leaders meet with parents of children who require additional support to plan and review targeted work together. Parents are positive about the progress their children make. Most children who require support with learning are making good progress towards their agreed targets, particularly in wellbeing.

- St Thomas' Primary School has a unique profile in the high number of children and families with English as an additional language (EAL). The harmonious blend of nationalities and cultures is a strength of the school. Staff support children who are new to English effectively. They utilise well the support from EAL partners from the local authority and evidence well the progress children make as they move through the school. Most children develop social skills, confidence and language acquisition successfully in an inclusive and supportive environment.

- Senior leaders have created an effective positive relationships policy. Teachers implement this well to ensure a consistent and clear language is used to manage and support behaviour across the school. Almost all children behave well. Senior leaders developed an anti-bullying policy which sets out how children will be supported in instances of alleged bullying and the steps which will be taken to address any bullying behaviour. Most children, parents and staff believe bullying is dealt with effectively. Staff participated in professional learning on nurture principles and de-escalation. They understand and implement effectively how to support

children who become unsettled or distressed. Children thrive in the safe and nurturing environment this consistent and calm approach creates.

■ Children participate in religious observance through assemblies, daily prayer, celebrating Mass, and close links with the local priest. Faith is a central part of life at St Thomas' and children and families value the close partnerships with the local parish. Teachers use the religious education programme well to support children to respect others' beliefs and values.

■ The headteacher is proactive in following up any attendance concerns, using Angus Council's attendance policy. She makes families aware of the importance of good attendance and supports families to access help to improve attendance, for example, breakfast club. Attendance is in line with the national average.

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
- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is good. Most children at P1, P4 and P7 achieve expected curriculum for excellence levels of attainment. A few children are working beyond national expectations.

- Most children who require support with their learning, including children for whom English is an additional language, make good progress from starting school, particularly in language acquisition. Across the school, a few children would benefit from more challenge in their learning. This should support all children to make the best possible progress in their learning.

- At first level, a minority of children require more targeted support in literacy and numeracy to meet current predicted national expectations. Senior leaders and teachers should review planned learning and interventions to ensure all children at first level progress as well as expected.

Attainment in literacy and English
- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English. Across the school, teachers should support children to improve the presentation and standard of written work.

Listening and talking
- At early level, most children follow instructions and respond appropriately when talking in groups. At first level, most children are beginning to make accurate notes from information heard. A minority need further support to listen carefully to instructions and interact appropriately when talking and listening in groups. At second level, most children engage well in discussions, sharing their opinions with evidence to support their views. They should be supported to build on the views of others by asking each other relevant and challenging questions to broaden the discussion.

Reading
- At early level, most children use their knowledge of sounds to read simple words. They understand simple punctuation and answer questions about stories they listen to. At first level, most children share texts they enjoy. They explain what happens in a story and predict what might happen next. They need to develop a clearer understanding of the features of non-fiction texts. At second level most children answer a range of questions, including inferential and evaluative to show their understanding of a text. They should continue to extend their vocabulary and range of genres read.

Writing
- At early level, most children create their own stories through pictures and emergent writing to share with others. They are beginning to write simple words using taught sounds. They need to

write more regularly, through play and planned learning, to increase their confidence to write. At first level, most children are beginning to use a range of punctuation when writing. They now need to revisit their writing after feedback to extend and develop their work. At second level, children write increasingly detailed informative and persuasive texts. They are confident in using the appropriate style and features of writing to draw the reader in. They use teacher feedback to reflect on their work and would benefit from having more formal targets in writing to clarify their next steps to improve their work.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are supported well to exceed national expectations.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children recognise the numbers of objects in a group without counting. Most children recognise an increasing range of numbers and sequence them in the correct order. Children apply addition and subtraction skills confidently to pay the exact value of items. A few children need further support to reinforce correct number formations. At first level, the majority of children read, write and sequence numbers to 1000 and round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. Children need further practise of using known strategies to solve two step problems. At second level, most children demonstrate confidence in mental processes through a sound knowledge of number facts. Children apply knowledge of equivalent forms of fractions, decimal fractions and percentages to solve problems successfully. Children would benefit from increased opportunities to apply their learning in real-life contexts.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children confidently recognise, describe and sort two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. Children at early level should continue to practise the language of position and direction. At first level, most children use mathematical language to describe the properties of a range of common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. Children working at first level are less confident with angles and directions. At second level, children identify an increasing range of angles, including acute, obtuse and reflex. Children use their knowledge of the link between the eight compass points and angles to describe, follow and record directions. They are less confident with complementary and supplementary angles.

Information handling

- Across the school, children undertake surveys and display and interpret information in a range of ways. At early level, most children use their knowledge of colour, shape, size and other properties to match and sort items accurately in a variety of ways. At first level, the majority of children use surveys, questionnaires or group tallies to sort data accurately for a given purpose. Most children at second level use digital technology skills well to collect, display and analyse a range of information. Across the school, children would benefit further from applying skills in information handling in a range of real-life and meaningful contexts.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders have reviewed and strengthened their approaches to gathering and analysing data on children's attainment. They have increased assessment and moderation approaches across the school to ensure teachers have a clearer understanding of children's progress across and within levels. This is ensuring attainment data is more accurate across the school. These improved approaches evidence the good progress most children make in literacy and numeracy. However, there is scope for senior leaders to strengthen these approaches further, for example, to develop a strategic overview of children's attainment over time. This should include more robust data about the impact of interventions, particularly for children facing barriers to learning. Senior leaders should ensure they have clearer measures of how they are closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children are encouraged to share their achievements gained within school at assemblies. They are awarded house points and Star of the Week certificates for efforts and success linked to the school values. Other certificates include a class Reader of the Week and a Headteacher Award for going above and beyond. Achievements gained outside of school are also recognised at assemblies and displayed on a Wall of Fame. This supports children to recognise and feel proud of their success.

- Children use online learning journals to record achievements. This is well received by parents. All classes are supported by staff to share weekly learning round-ups with parents to celebrate learning achievements of the class. This is helping children to review their progress. Teachers should now support children to deepen their reflections to develop meaningful targets for learning. A minority of children are developing leadership skills through committees and pupil groups. Staff should now engage children across the school in developing their skills in leadership. They should explore how they can support children to identify the skills they are developing and build on them as they move through school.

Equity for all learners

- All staff know children and families very well and take action sensitively to mitigate against the barriers children and families face. For example, senior leaders work effectively in partnership with the Parish to provide and run a well-established and successful food hub. This is sustained by grants and local businesses. The hub provides free school uniform and promotes equity for all children. Senior leaders also take steps to reduce the costs of the school day with reduced costs for trips and a commitment that no child will miss out on any experiences due to financial constraints.

- A free breakfast club on the campus ensures all children who need it have daily access to a healthy and positive start to the school day. This is impacting positively on a number of families and effectively supports a few children to attend school on time.

- Senior leaders recognise the need for more consistent and explicit measures of interventions to evidence clearly the impact of PEF. Senior leaders should now review data on children's attainment for those impacted by poverty, identify gaps in learning and ensure interventions are accelerating closing gaps in learning.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.