Summarised inspection findings

Dornoch Primary School

The Highland Council

11 February 2025

Key contextual information

Dornoch Primary School is a non-denominational school situated in the town of Dornoch, in Highland Council.

The headteacher has been in post as the Dornoch Campus headteacher since 2017. Dornoch Campus includes Dornoch Academy and Bonar Bridge Primary. The depute headteacher of Dornoch Primary has been in post since 2019. There is one principal teacher who is class committed for three days per week.

The current school roll is 167 children working across seven classes. There is a total teaching staff complement of 8.4 full-time equivalent including a support for learning teacher. There are five pupil support assistants. There are also a number of teachers, support assistants and support for learning teachers who work across the Dornoch Campus. In addition, there are visiting specialists who provide instrumental tuition.

Almost all children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation decile zones five to seven. Approximately 35% of children require additional support with their learning. This number has risen over the last two years. There have been no exclusions in the last five years. Attendance is above the national and local authority average.

Dornoch Primary School nursery class was inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the past 18 months, therefore, the local authority and headteacher had the option to include the nursery class as part of this inspection. We have agreed with the local authority and school that the nursery class is not part of this inspection. The findings set out below are for the primary school stages.

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 embody the school values of achieving, belonging and caring very well. Staff, parents, children and partners feel these values underpin the ethos of the school. Staff use the values well with children in daily interactions. Staff build positive relationships with children and with each other. As result, almost all children are confident, polite and enthusiastic learners.

■ Across the school, almost all children behave very well. Staff use praise and encouragement, along with the school values to support children's behaviour effectively. Children are proud of their school and won a national award for their work on promoting kindness. Staff and children celebrate kindness at weekly assemblies and classes receive 'kindness' cups of the week. Staff support older children to understand the impact of positive behaviour during physical education (PE) lessons. Children lead and manage team games assuming a refereeing role. This helps children to compete whilst acting respectfully to others.

■ Staff create well-organised, inviting learning environments. They display children's work and achievements prominently. Children learn outdoors regularly in the school grounds and nearby woods. This motivates children successfully and helps them to develop skills for learning, life and work. Most children engage actively in their learning. They work effectively individually, in pairs or groups supporting each other well during collaborative tasks. Most teachers match tasks well to children's interests. In a few lessons, teachers provide all children with learning at the right level of difficulty. In these examples, teachers meet children's learning needs well including children who require challenge. Across the school, at times, a few children disengage from their learning. This is often due to the pace of learning being too slow or when tasks and activities are not challenging enough. Senior leaders should support staff to share effective practice in this area to help develop consistent high-quality learning and teaching.

■ Most teachers use digital technology effectively to enhance children's learning. Digital leaders support the use of technologies across the school by maintaining devices and timetabling their distribution. Children apply their learning well using technology. For example, children use software to create and share their knowledge of how electrical circuits work. Children use matrix bar codes and digital devices confidently to access online games that reinforce and deepen their learning. Staff build children's digital literacy skills well across the curriculum in progressive and relevant ways.

■ Staff are beginning to develop their knowledge and understanding of play pedagogy. They have audited and adapted the early level learning environment effectively, creating classroom zones which support children's learning experiences. Staff would benefit from engagement with national practice guidance to develop further their approaches to play. They should ensure they provide children with an appropriate balance of adult-initiated and child-initiated play experiences. This should help children to make better progress in their learning.

■ All staff reflect carefully on the quality of their work and are keen to improve their practice. They support each other very well and willingly share ideas with colleagues across the Dornoch Campus. Almost all teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. During lessons, most teachers share effectively the purpose of learning and measures of success with children. Staff would benefit from professional learning to ensure that measures of success consistently link to children's planned learning. Most teachers use questioning effectively to check for understanding and to recall and review prior learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers incorporate higher-order questioning that encourages children's deeper thinking and analysis.

■ Teachers recently developed their approaches to the teaching of writing. Most teachers now provide effective oral and written feedback and encourage children to self-assess their writing against set criteria. As a result, children's engagement in and motivation for writing is improving. Most teachers create whole-class targets for literacy and numeracy. As part of school improvement staff are developing digital profiles with targets for children. As they move this work forward, teachers should now help children to set personal learning targets. This will support children to have a clearer understanding of their own strengths and next steps.

■ Senior leaders have created a helpful assessment calendar. This helps teachers to know which assessments they should carry out and when, and how and where they should record the results. Working collaboratively, teachers created assessments that link across different curricular subjects. These support them to gather a wider range of information about the progress children make in their learning. Teachers also agreed worthwhile ways to gather summative assessment evidence. This is beginning to lead to greater consistency in assessing and recording children's progress and attainment. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to develop approaches to planning assessment and using assessment information to evidence children's progress and attainment.

■ Almost all teachers engage well in moderation activities, working very collaboratively with colleagues across the Dornoch Campus. This is developing further teachers' understanding of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) standards in writing. Senior leaders should continue to provide teachers with further moderation activities using the learning, teaching and assessment cycle. This would support teachers' clearer understanding of gathering robust and reliable assessment evidence to demonstrate children's achievement of, and progress towards a CfE level.

■ Working together, staff have improved approaches to planning for literacy and numeracy. Teachers plan progressive learning well for children in literacy and numeracy across various timescales. They use local authority progression frameworks, linked to CfE experiences and outcomes, to support their planning in other areas. Teachers also plan learning that links different curricular areas over a three-year period. This provides children with breadth and depth in their learning. Children have an element of choice in their learning by choosing the context for topics. Building on this, teachers should further involve children actively in planning their own learning.

■ Last session, staff started to use a more detailed tracking system to record all children's progress and attainment in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders meet with staff three times a year to discuss the individual progress of all children. Staff increasingly use their assessment data during tracking meetings. Senior leaders and teachers should interrogate assessment data carefully during tracking meetings to ensure it is valid and reliable. This will develop their confidence and skills in using robust assessment data to review children's progress. Senior leaders rightly highlight the need to identify and plan learning for children who require challenge in their learning. They recognise that this is an important step in ensuring all children make the best possible progress and raising levels of attainment across the school.

■ Last session, senior leaders developed a useful tracking system to monitor the progress of children who require additional support with their learning. This is supporting teachers well to plan and implement useful interventions for these children. Support for learning teachers and support assistants provide children with valuable help in literacy and numeracy. Senior leaders should measure whether interventions accelerate children's progress and close gaps in their attainment.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

◼ 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.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	satisfactory

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
- Overall, attainment in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. Most children achieve nationally expected CfE levels in listening and talking. The majority of children at early and first levels, and most children at second level achieve national expectations in reading and writing. Across all levels, the majority of children achieve national expectations in numeracy and mathematics.

- The majority of children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards their individual targets.

- Across the school, there are a few children at each stage who would benefit from further challenge in their learning.

Attainment in literacy and English
- Overall, the majority of children make satisfactory progress in literacy and English. Most children make good progress in listening and talking.

Listening and talking
- Across the school, almost all children are articulate when speaking to others. They use a wide range of vocabulary according to their age and stage. At early level, most children retell a familiar story with accuracy, sharing their thoughts clearly about characters and settings. At first level, most children respond appropriately to others during group discussions. They need further experiences to develop their oral presentation skills. At second level, most children explain clearly the differences between fact and opinion. They are becoming increasingly confident in using notes to support their point of view during debates. Children will develop their debating skills further through using rhetorical questioning or presenting counter arguments.

Reading
- Children access books in inviting class libraries and older children access the campus library in Dornoch Academy. This is promoting a reading culture effectively. At early level, the majority of children identify well the initial sounds of letters within words. They are beginning to apply sound blends to read familiar words. At first level, the majority of children read aloud fluently using their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode unfamiliar words. They summarise key events in a story well. At second level, most children read aloud fluently. They use reading strategies such as summarising and prediction to support their understanding of texts. Children at first and second level are not yet confident in identifying and discussing the features of non-fiction texts. Children need to study non-fiction texts as part of their planned reading lessons.

Writing

■ Across the school, children present their work well for their age and stage using legible handwriting. At early level, the majority of children enjoy exploring letters within play and imaginative contexts. They need to practise writing in sentences using capital letters and full stops. At first level, the majority of children write in sentences spelling most everyday words correctly. They write instructions well, outlining steps in a sequence and using simple connectives to structure sentences. At second level, most children use figurative language well, such as simile and metaphor, to enhance their writing. At second level, children are developing their use of punctuation. For example, children use direct speech-marks accurately. Children across the school need to write extended texts more frequently as appropriate to their age and stage.

Numeracy and mathematics

■ Overall, the majority of children make satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. Teachers use new planning approaches well which are helping them to address gaps in children's mathematical knowledge.

Number, money and measure

■ Children at all stages work confidently with concepts of time as appropriate to their age and stage. At early level, the majority of children recognise numerals up to 20 accurately. They are beginning to use mathematical symbols for 'addition' and 'equals to' to complete number calculations. At first level, the majority of children have a firm understanding of place value up to 1,000. They add and subtract two- and three-digit numbers but require consolidation of this concept. Children need to revise concepts of division and multiplication. At second level, the majority of children have a firm understanding of addition and subtraction using numbers up to 10,000 and beyond. They understand place value well including decimal numbers. Children are not yet confident with the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages.

Shape, position and movement

■ At early level, the majority of children use positional language well. For example, they use terms such as horizontal and vertical. At first level, the majority of children name a range of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects describing their properties well. They are less confident in identifying a right angle. The majority of children at second level classify acute and obtuse angles confidently. They recognise common three-dimensional objects and would benefit from revision of using mathematical vocabulary to discuss their properties.

Information handling

■ At early level, the majority of children sort information accurately under a given heading. At first level, the majority of children use information well from tally charts to create graphs. They know a graph has two axes with labels and a key. Children work confidently with Venn diagrams to sort information linked to criteria. At second level, the majority of children understand how to gather, sort and display information. They need to apply this knowledge more in practical information handling tasks and in using digital technology to create graphs and charts.

Attainment over time

■ Senior leaders have attainment data for children over several years. There is clear evidence that staff have raised attainment which is closing gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have developed approaches to literacy and numeracy which are impacting positively on children's engagement. It is too early to evidence the impact of these universal approaches on children's attainment. Staff should continue to develop their use of assessment data to measure the difference that these approaches make to children's attainment.

- Senior leaders and staff are beginning to develop shared expectations of children's progress and attainment. They are at the very early stages of identifying trends in attainment of groups and cohorts of children over time. Senior leaders and staff need to robustly interrogate assessment data and evidence during tracking meetings. This should support them to know what robust evidence they will gather to demonstrate children's progress and attainment.

Attendance

- Attendance across the school is above national and local authority levels. However, there are a few children whose attendance is below 90%. Senior leaders identify that this is impacting negatively on children's levels of attainment. They follow local authority guidance to address issues and provide one-to-one support through phone calls and meetings to help individuals where needed. Senior leaders should share the school's attendance policy widely with all parents to ensure there is a clear understanding of expectations around attendance.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Staff celebrate and share widely children's achievements in class, in school displays, assemblies, newsletters and on the school website. Children enjoy sharing their certificates with their families which they store in their personal profiles. This helps to build children's confidence. Children would benefit from reflecting upon the skills they are developing through their wider achievements both in and out of school. As a next step, senior leaders and staff should further develop approaches to tracking children's achievements. This will help to ensure that no child is at risk of missing out.

- Children attend a range of enjoyable lunchtime clubs and activities provided by staff and partners. For example, a 'books and biscuits' club, cross country and Scripture Union. These support children's literacy, social and sporting skills well.

- Older children undertake a range of valuable leadership roles. For example, they take a lunchtime dance club for younger children, act as Junior Road Safety Officers, eco committee members and as pupil council representatives. They contribute effectively to the life of the school as lunchtime and playground monitors or buddies. These committees and roles support children's leadership and organisational skills effectively and help them to be responsible citizens. Staff should now widen these roles to enable all children, including those at the younger stages, to develop their leadership skills.

- Children contribute effectively to the local community through partnerships, work with charities, the local care home and in community events. These experiences enable children to demonstrate their skills for learning, life and work in real life contexts. Staff have established very meaningful partnerships with local organisations, charities, businesses and clubs. Children develop a range of musical, sporting and artistic skills as a result of these partnerships. For example, children develop their golfing and cricketing skills in partnership with local sports clubs.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and all staff know children and their families well. School staff operate a 'cost of the school day' policy to ensure that children can attend excursions at minimal or zero cost. This is supported well by the Parent Council and wider parent body who fundraise regularly throughout the school year.

■ Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the socio-economic context of the school community. They use Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide additional staff who support interventions in numeracy. As staff implement approaches to closing the attainment gap, senior leaders need to ensure that PEF is used to support identified children. Senior leaders and staff need to develop robust strategic approaches to demonstrate the impact of PEF on raising attainment and accelerating children's progress.

Other relevant evidence

- Across the school, children receive high-quality French lessons. Staff are developing the use of British Sign Language as part of the school's approach to the 1+2 languages policy.

- Children receive their entitlement to religious and moral education and religious observance.

- All children experience two hours of high-quality physical education every week.

- Senior leaders and staff are working closely with the local library service to review the range of texts available for children. Across the school, children should be able to access a wider range of authors and reading material including texts that about different cultures, races and beliefs.

- Senior leaders use staffing effectively across the Dornoch Campus to provide effective transitions for children moving into primary or onto secondary. This is supporting children's continuity of learning well.

- Senior leaders should consult with parents on the use of PEF.

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.