

Summarised inspection findings

Lairhillock Primary School

Aberdeenshire Council

5 September 2023

Key contextual information

Lairhillock Primary School is a non-denominational school situated in rural Aberdeenshire. The school opened in 2007 following the merger of three smaller schools. The catchment area covers a large geographical area. Almost all children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation areas eight to ten. The current school roll is 137 across seven classes.

The school has had four headteachers over the last three years. The current headteacher took up post in October 2022.

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 benefit from a calm, supportive learning environment. Staff successfully place a strong emphasis on developing and maintaining positive relationships. A majority of children describe enjoying school with most feeling that they are being encouraged to do their best. Displays of children's work in classrooms and corridors reinforce this message. Most children engage well in their learning. They are enthusiastic and in group activities most children collaborate effectively with each other.
- Children welcome the opportunities they have to assume leadership roles and take on responsibilities in their classrooms. Children see these opportunities as successfully developing confidence levels and their skills of working with others. A majority of children agree they have opportunities to influence what they will learn when teachers are planning topics to explore.
- In all classes, teachers provide clear direction and instructions to which most children respond promptly. In most lessons, teacher explanations support children's understanding of the activity. All teachers offer children ongoing support and guidance in the course of a lesson. In almost all lessons, the purpose of learning and how children will achieve success are effectively shared. In a few lessons, children are involved in co-constructing what success looks like. Teachers should now link success and learning activities more explicitly to the school's skills framework through, for example, plenary reflections. This should help children better understand how their learning is helping them to develop as individuals.
- In most classes, learning is teacher-led and delivered as whole class lessons. In a few lessons, teachers use differentiation well to meet the needs of learners. Teachers need to adjust the balance from teacher-directed to more child-led activities that encourage reflection and investigation. Staff should continue to build on the progress already made in the use of questioning beyond checking for understanding to more open-ended questioning. This should promote higher order skills of analysis and evaluation. Staff have rightly identified improving the consistency of feedback as a priority to further children's confidence and the skills of

independent and resilient learners. Across all stages, teachers need to ensure appropriate pace and challenge to reflect the needs of all learners. Teachers should use the recently developed school frameworks for learning and teaching, and assessment to improve further the quality of learning and teaching across the school.

- In a majority of classes, children work well in pairs and groups. Teachers should build on this to increase opportunities for children to exercise greater initiative in problem solving and enquiry-based activities. Children better understand the relevance of what they are learning when linked to real life contexts, for example the environment.
- The extensive school grounds provide children with a range of well-planned leisure options. A designated garden area and open-air classroom supports outdoor learning. Children speak positively of their enjoyment in growing plants, in better understanding nature and using the outdoor space for physical activity. There remains scope to maximise its use to include more curriculum areas within a planned progressive programme of outdoor learning.
- Teachers use digital technology effectively to enhance learning. In all classes, teachers use digital technology to outline learning activities and provide a stimulus for classroom activities. Across stages, children confidently use digital devices to process data and undertake tasks associated with their learning, including reflecting and peer assessing their work. Children develop their research skills well, their handling of coding, and the presentation of news stories in the Lairhillock Express.
- The visually inviting school library provides children with a wide range of reading material. All classes access this central resource for private reading and for activities linked to classroom learning. For individual children and small groups, the library serves as an effective break out space.
- Teachers plan well children's learning using experiences and outcomes. Class teachers make effective use of National Benchmarks and Aberdeenshire progression frameworks to assess and record children's progress. Teachers should engage in moderation activities within and beyond the school to support further planning within and across a level. Staff at early level should engage with colleagues in the nursery class to ensure learning across the early level builds effectively on children's prior learning.
- Teachers make effective use of a range of formative assessment strategies to gauge children's level of understanding and recall of information. They support children in their learning with oral feedback. Greater consistency in this area will support children in developing their confidence and skills as learners.
- The headteacher has introduced a whole school approach to assessment and the review of children's progress. He works closely with staff to bring a sharper focus to monitoring children's learning. Teachers are engaging well in collegiate activities to analyse assessment data. This is developing further staff confidence in determining the achievement of levels.
- All teachers plan learning with flexibility to respond to children's interests and needs. Their long term planning supports teachers in covering all areas of the curriculum. Teachers and the headteacher should keep under review the emphasis being given to different aspects of learning to ensure entitlements are being fully met.

- Teachers track the progress of individuals and groups of children in literacy and numeracy. They use daily check-ins to monitor the wellbeing of children across all stages. The headteacher meets with teachers to discuss children's progress three times in the school year. They use these meetings well to monitor, review and record children's progress and identify learners who require support, are on track, or are exceeding expectations. Teachers should now ensure assessment information is used to provide appropriate challenge and support for all children.

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

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

- Attainment data provided by the school shows variations in recent years and across cohorts. The new headteacher has taken positive steps to strengthen the evidence teachers gather when making judgements on children's progress and attainment. As a result, teacher judgements on children's attainment are increasingly reliable and robust.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good. Most children at early level are on track to achieve expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in reading and writing. Almost all children at early level are on track to achieve expected levels in listening and talking and numeracy and mathematics. Almost all children at first level are on track to achieve expected CfE levels in literacy and numeracy. Most children at second level are on track to achieve expected levels in reading, listening and talking and numeracy and mathematics. A majority of children at second level are on track to achieve expected levels in writing.
- Most children with additional support needs are making good progress from their prior levels of attainment.
- Children come to Lairhillock Primary with strong literacy and numeracy skills. There is scope for children across the school to achieve more and make better progress as they move through the school.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- At early level, most children listen well in class. They articulate their views with confidence. A few children require support to allow others time to express their ideas. At first level, children contribute well to group discussions. They discuss their views on their library book and offer reasons why they enjoy certain texts. At second level, most children build on and develop the ideas expressed by others. They now need to develop a better understanding of the interconnection between talking and listening within group situations.

Reading

- At early level, children use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read simple words. A few children recognise vocabulary linked to their topic work. At first level, most children explain the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. They give examples of reading for different purposes, for example, enjoyment or research. At second level, a majority of children describe how an author has captured the atmosphere of a setting or personality of a

character. Most children recall accurately key information from texts they read. At first and second level, children's class novels could be more challenging.

Writing

- At early level, almost all children copy sentences and add one or two of their own words. They write labels for wall displays. Children at early level are developing confidence when writing independently. At first level, children write across a range of genre and for different purposes. They are aware of the key features of punctuation and the importance of word choice. At second level, a majority of children successfully develop their extended writing through self and peer assessment. A majority of children make connections with the writing styles in books they have read and successfully replicate them in their own writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children recognise numbers to 20. They confidently add numbers within ten. Children at early level are developing their confidence in using o'clock and half-past to tell the time. At first level, most children solve addition and subtraction problems with three-digit numbers. They add amounts to find the total cost of several items. They are less confident using subtraction to calculate change. At second level, most children solve simple algebraic equations. They add and subtract negative numbers accurately. Across first and second level, children are less confident solving mathematical problems with more than one step. All children need to develop confidence and skill in mental agility.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children name and describe common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. At first level, most children identify lines of symmetry in common two-dimensional shapes. They calculate the perimeter and area of simple shapes. At second level, most children plot co-ordinates on four quadrant grids. They recognise and draw nets of three-dimensional objects.

Information handling

- At second level, children are developing confidence in extracting data from a range of charts, tables and graphs. They use appropriate mathematical language such as label, title, scale and axis when working with graphs and charts. At early and first level, children need greater opportunity to collect, organise and display data for a range of purposes.

Attainment over time

- Staff gather attainment of a level information for children at the end of P1, P4 and P7. Changes in leadership has affected the frequency of collection and the reliability of data collected. As a result, attainment data provided by the school shows a varying picture over time. The headteacher quickly recognised the need to strengthen approaches to tracking children's progress and attainment. He has now established a comprehensive system to gather robust information on attainment and progress.
- Teachers make effective use of Scottish National Standardised Assessment data in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher has used this data to demonstrate progress over time for children in P1, P4 and P7. The introduction of summative assessments across the school is beginning to evidence more clearly progress and next steps for children at all stages.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- The headteacher meets with every child to discuss their achievements. He records children's participation in activities within and outwith school. This is helping staff to identify children who are missing out on opportunities. As planned, the headteacher should develop this further to track the skills children develop through their participation.
- All children contribute to the life of the school through their involvement in the Values Leadership Groups. Children recognise their contribution and the work of their peers in improving their school through these groups. They talk positively about the projects each group is undertaking. For example, the kindness group are renovating a friendship bench in the playground to improve the wellbeing of children across the school. Children talk confidently about the skills in communication and teamwork they develop as they plan and lead their projects.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher is at the early stages of working with staff to identify attainment gaps across the school. Together, they identified a cohort of children who were particularly impacted by the periods of remote learning. Effective use of data supported staff to plan targeted support in writing. This included team teaching, increased time for writing and the use of technology. As a result, all children have made significant progress and are back on track. Staff should now build on this positive approach to using data to identify children with potential barriers to their learning. They should continue to plan carefully targeted supports and interventions to close any attainment gaps that exist.

Other relevant evidence

- 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 sample documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

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.