

Summarised inspection findings

Orchard Brae School

Aberdeen City Council

2 July 2019

Key contextual information

Orchard Brae School is an all-through special school for children and young people with a range of additional support needs. The school is the result of a merger of two special schools and an early years provision. At the time of inspection, the roll of the school was 118 children and young people. There is a 40 place nursery across two sites.

1.3 Leadership of change

weak

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 executive headteacher, together with other members of the senior leadership team (SLT), has worked hard with all members of the school community to enable a smooth transition into Orchard Brae School from the previous establishments. As a result, staff, children and young people have settled well into their new school. The executive headteacher is respected by staff, parents and partners. She is well supported by the heads of nursery, primary and secondary. The SLT are strongly committed to ensuring the school is an important part of the local community and a resource for all children in the city who have additional support needs. The SLT now need to lead and empower staff to identify what they need to do to improve. This will help ensure that the school delivers the best possible opportunities and outcomes for all children, young people and their families.
- The school's vision, values and aims were developed as a result of significant consultation with staff, parents, pupils and partners. The school values of equity, positivity, respect, kinship, nurture and honesty were agreed to capture the context of the school. Appropriate and ambitious aims have been agreed and some of these aims, such as working closely with partners, are beginning to impact positively on the work of the school. Staff now need to work with pupils and other stakeholders to achieve the aims they have agreed and ensure they are embedded in day-to-day practice and result in positive outcomes for pupils.
- The school has identified a number of areas for improvement and these are detailed within the school improvement plan. Approaches to self-evaluation need to be improved to better identify what the school is doing well and areas for improvement. The school needs to ensure that self-evaluation includes information from a range of sources with a greater focus on using evidence from quality assurance activities. As they continue to develop approaches to self-evaluation, staff should visit other establishments to see high-quality practice in other schools.
- Staff participate in a range of professional learning opportunities such as manual handling and autism awareness training to help enable them to support children and young people. All staff have opportunities to meet annually with a member of the SLT to discuss their professional learning needs. Staff who are new to the school say that they would benefit from specific induction training. As the school develops approaches to self-evaluation and school improvement, professional learning discussions and subsequent training should be more

closely aligned with priorities for improvement. There needs to be a much greater focus on ensuring that all staff participate in high-quality, career long professional learning and that teaching staff engage fully with the General Teaching Council for Scotland Professional Standards.

- The school has undergone significant staffing changes since the merger. This has included recruitment of new staff, redeployment and job matching exercises. An overall increase in staffing numbers is leading to additional administration and managerial duties for senior leaders. Senior leaders say that this is impacting on the time available for self-evaluation, school improvement and quality assurance. The SLT needs to ensure that there are increased opportunities to be present in classes and around the school in order to have a better awareness of day-to-day practice. This will help senior leaders to work with staff to improve aspects of the school such as learning and teaching. As roles and remits are better established, staff at all levels should have opportunities to develop leadership skills and take increasing responsibility for implementing change and improvement. Senior leaders should empower staff to lead and take ownership of aspects of school improvement.
- The school has received approximately £26,000 in pupil equity funding (PEF). The SLT has recognised the need to provide children and young people with more opportunities to engage in physical and social activities. The school has used this funding for lunchtime and evening activities including swimming and football. The school should now evaluate the impact of these activities to determine if they are improving attainment and achievement. Staff should also aim to improve children's and young people's attendance at these activities.
- Almost all children and young people responded well to the move to their new school. They benefited from the preparation work undertaken. There are a few opportunities for children and young people to develop leadership skills and take responsibility for implementing improvements and change in their new school. For example, senior phase pupils have opportunities to fund some activities through enterprise projects. There is scope to improve approaches to pupil participation and leadership across the school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

unsatisfactory

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

- Overall, children and young people respond positively to the familiarity of their daily routines. However, in too many lessons there is a lack of planned learning for children and young people which would enable them to make progress with their skills or understanding. In almost all lessons, there is a lack of appropriate pace and challenge. Timetabled activities rarely relate to curriculum areas and it is not always clear how these activities will contribute positively to the learning of children and young people in the class. There is currently an over-emphasis on activities which do not introduce children and young people to new or challenging learning opportunities. In almost all lessons, staff do not use formative assessment techniques to structure their lessons. Doing so would help clarify what is to be learned and how it is to be achieved for learners.
- The majority of children and young people are generally engaged in their lessons, although in some classes only a minority are interested and actively involved in their learning. Learning activities need to be more challenging and enjoyable across the school. More could be done to ensure that learning activities are matched to the needs and interests of children and young people, such as ensuring relevant and meaningful contexts for learning. Better use of outdoor spaces would enhance learning opportunities for children. In a few lessons, tasks are appropriately organised in an individualised way. However, in many classes, learning activities are not sufficiently differentiated for the varying needs of children and young people. Almost all lessons are whole class activities.
- Children and young people respond well to opportunities to develop and practise their life skills, for example in cookery lessons, work experience placements or independent travel development.
- Staff should ensure that learning experiences take account of the school's recently developed aims such as 'We will engage in learning which is fun and challenging'. Staff would benefit from opportunities to visit other schools to develop a better understanding of high-quality learning and teaching that meets the needs of all learners. Senior managers are aware that they should undertake more regular observation of classes to improve the quality of learning and teaching and to monitor the development of the curriculum across the school.
- Appropriate use is made of alternative communication approaches across the school, including signing, signifiers and technology. As a result, children and young people are able to give their opinions during lessons. There are a few examples of interactive technology being used effectively which the school should now build on to make learning more appropriate, engaging and exciting for children and young people.
- Too many lessons are organised to be experiential rather than developing children's and young people's skills and abilities. Whilst the language level may be appropriate for learners, the

subject matter could be more mature to help them to develop their outlook of the community they live in. Overall, staff need to be more ambitious in their lesson planning and have higher expectations of what children and young people can achieve.

- Teachers and support staff assess the progress of learners through observation during lessons. This procedure varies from class to class but involves the recording of notable achievements for individual children and young people using an Individual Learner Diary (ILD). 'I can' statements are added to demonstrate what children and young people are able to do. The ILD is currently only accessible by school staff. The school has plans to share information within ILDs with parents. There is a significant amount of valuable information captured within ILDs. However, information in ILDs does not contribute to tracking and monitoring approaches and it is not clear how the information is used to identify progress over time or next steps in learning. Whilst the school has a number of different electronic approaches to recording the achievements and attainment of children and young people, these are not interrogated for trends. The school has plans to bring achievement and attainment data into a single electronic system, enabling senior leaders to have a more accurate picture of the impact of the curriculum across the school.
- Staff have participated in training related to individualised educational programmes (IEPs) and guidance has been produced by the SLT. Staff assess and record the achievement of targets within IEPs. However, this is not being carried out consistently in all classes. The recording and assessment related to targets does not provide good quality information about progress. There is little evidence of how information related to progress is used to review and refresh targets. A minority of pupils appear to be successful in achieving targets for prolonged periods of time with no account taken of their successes. The school is aware that it needs to better collate and analyse this information.
- Staff should continue to evaluate approaches to planning to ensure consistency across the school and to facilitate progression and moderation. Staff report that aspects of planning for classes is carried out verbally and not always recorded. Similarly, they report that planning for children through the broad general education is intended to be linked to the curriculum whilst senior phase provision is driven by the interests and needs of individual young people. Overall, the school recognises that it has more work to do to appropriately plan, track and monitor the progress of children and young people in their learning.
- Staff use a planning wheel to develop an individual approach for young people in the senior phase. This is used to identify appropriate targets and approaches for young people across 12 areas of skills for learning, life and work. Whilst this has the potential to be a helpful approach, work needs to be done to enable this to link better with the curriculum and other aspects of individualised planning such as IEPs.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The school has worked with stakeholders to create a draft rationale for the curriculum which reflects the unique context of the school. It is underpinned by the school's vision, values and aims, and takes appropriate account of national guidance. The school needs to revise the rationale to ensure that all children and young people receive their full entitlement and that they are offered the appropriate levels of challenge and depth in learning. Senior leaders should continue to develop a shared understanding of the curriculum rationale to ensure it informs learning experiences across the school. It will be important to continue to review the effectiveness of the curriculum rationale in delivering the high aspirations set for learners within the school's vision, values and aims.
- Progression pathways for all areas of the curriculum to support the delivery of the broad general education and senior phase need to be developed. This will support the school to raise attainment and ensure positive outcomes for learners. National curriculum guidance and the Career Education Standards (3–18) should be used to inform this development process. At present, curriculum plans reflect coverage of experiences and outcomes, rather than demonstrating planned progression. A shared understanding of curricular progression and skill development needs to be developed across the school.
- The curriculum is delivered through core targets and interdisciplinary topics. A five-year interdisciplinary learning framework has been developed and is being implemented across the school. The main curricular focus of interdisciplinary learning is science and social subjects. Staff should be supported to develop a clearer understanding of interdisciplinary learning to ensure appropriate progression in learning.
- The school is well equipped with good facilities such as a swimming pool, rebound therapy room and extensive outdoor play resources. The school makes limited use of the outdoor space within the school grounds. The school was recently awarded Green Flag status. Children and young people would benefit from outdoor learning being planned in a progressive way.
- At the senior phase, young people have the option to choose from a number of National Qualifications units, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, programmes in partnership with the local college and work experience placements. As recognised by the school, there is a need to provide far more opportunities for all young people to gain qualifications and awards across the curriculum.
- The school has identified the need to create a sensory-based approach to learning to support the sensory needs of a number of children and young people. Staff are working to create a sensory profile alongside allied health partners. The profile is being designed to support the personalised approach and support strategies within planning learning for complex learners. The school should continue to develop this programme and ensure that it reflects Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes as well as taking account of planned opportunities for progression.

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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

weak

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

- The school recognises the need to develop a progressive health and wellbeing programme to ensure children and young people are developing skills and knowledge to help them keep safe and healthy. A few children and young people are learning about important issues such as keeping safe online and developing good relationships with others but this is not consistent across the school.
- Children and young people have relevant opportunities to take part in a range of physical activities such as swimming, football and basketball. Staff make appropriate use of facilities to promote physical activity such as the swimming pool, hydrotherapy pool and rebound therapy area.
- Staff have a sound understanding of the medical and care needs of children and young people. They work well with partners to meet the needs of children and young people. For example, speech and language therapists work collaboratively with staff to provide children and young people with appropriate communication strategies to support their health and wellbeing. The school uses a range of communication approaches that are generally well matched to the needs of individual pupils. As a result, almost all children and young people are able to make personal choices. The school needs to extend opportunities for children and young people to use their communication systems across a range of meaningful and challenging contexts.
- A number of staff are trained in recognised physical intervention approaches to support children and young people who experience challenging behaviour. Incidents in which restraint is used are routinely recorded by staff. The SLT have implemented changes to learning spaces in an attempt to reduce incidents of challenging behaviour. The school was able to provide information about the number of incidents of challenging behaviour that have occurred in the current school year. However, this information is not routinely collated or analysed. Staff should implement systems that will allow better analysis of information. Rigorous analysis, review and reflection will support staff in trying to reduce the number of incidents of challenging behaviour.
- Staff are able to talk about safeguarding and child protection procedures and can provide examples as to how these are applied. However, the school, in partnership with the education authority, needs to review and improve its approaches to safeguarding and child protection. As a matter of urgency, there should be a review of child protection documentation to ensure that reporting and recording procedures are being followed in line with education authority guidance.
- The school should review and improve approaches to food and nutrition and ensure all children and young people have access to healthy food and drinks. Throughout the day, and across almost all classes, there are too many activities that focus on eating. For example, many children are eating breakfast, snack and lunch within a three hour period. This frequency of

eating has the potential to impact negatively on the health and weight of pupils. In a few cases, the food choices offered to children and young people, such as cereals, contain high amounts of sugar. To address inconsistencies around food and health for children and young people, the school should take immediate action to review learning and practice across all contexts for learning. This review should reflect on the broad range of food-based learning experiences for children and young people both in and out of school. Ideally, learning experiences should be planned in line with a whole school policy on food and health, developed, agreed and implemented by all staff.

- School and catering staff informally discuss the dietary needs of children and young people. To ensure that these needs are fully provided for in class, at lunchtime and during out of school activities, a more formal approach is advisable at both planning and day-to-day operational level. Written information of sufficient quality and detail should be available for each child and young person. This information should be routinely reviewed by those around the child or young person, including catering staff, and amended as needs change. This information should also be readily available to others to ensure safe and consistent provision at all times, and to account for staff changes or absence.
- A minority of children have restricted diets as a result of self-selection in relation to an additional support need. The school should continue to work in partnership with families and catering staff to extend the range of tastes and textures eaten by children and young people, with reference to national guidance.
- There is scope for staff to use health and wellbeing contexts such as snack and lunchtime to help children and young people develop skills in other areas such as literacy and numeracy. Sessions when children and young people eat together could be more inclusive and facilitate better social interactions. There is also scope for children to be more independent at these times. In partnership with catering and class staff, as well as children and young people, the dining experience should be regularly reviewed. This will help ensure that all children and young people benefit from the best possible social and nutritional dining experience.
- A range of plans are in place to identify and record strategies to support children's and young people's wellbeing. These include child's plans, behaviour support plans and risk assessments. In line with education authority guidance, the school is currently transitioning to child's plans for all children and young people. Staff use the wellbeing indicators to identify children's and young people's strengths and needs within care plans. Individual long-term and short-term targets are identified to address wellbeing needs. Staff should help children and young people develop an understanding of the wellbeing indicators to support them to communicate their own feelings and needs. The majority of wellbeing targets are appropriate and the majority of children and young people achieve these targets. For a minority of pupils, targets need to provide more challenge. Staff need to review achievements of targets more frequently in order to build on successes and to enable children and young people to make better progress.
- Young people at the senior phase have opportunities to develop appropriate life skills. As a result, learners' are developing a range of skills such as cooking, shopping and budgeting to support their wellbeing when they leave school.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is weak. A lack of structure across the broad general education is having a detrimental impact on children's and young people's progress. Whilst there is a focus on literacy and communication across the school, greater opportunities to develop numeracy skills needs to be provided. There are significant periods of time during the school day where opportunities for planned learning are missed. In discussion with inspectors, senior leaders acknowledge the need to increase pace and challenge in learning across the school.

- Staff are at the very early stages of developing a shared understanding of Curriculum for Excellence standards. They have limited opportunities to participate in moderation activities. Recognising this, senior leaders have identified moderation as a development priority next session.

Literacy and English

- Taking account of the additional support needs of children and young people, overall, progress in literacy and English is weak.

Reading

- Reading is encouraged in a variety of ways. Whole school events, such as participation in World Book Day, library excursions and visits from a sensory storyteller, help to promote the enjoyment of books. Greater use could be made of the school library. Across the school, book studies are used to support interdisciplinary learning. In a few classes, children and young people were observed listening and responding well to stories. Communication approaches are used well to augment learners' understanding of sensory stories. A few children and young people can read extracts from books aloud, and respond to simple questions about the text. The use of visual timetables across the school is enabling children and young people to develop functional literacy skills.

Writing

- Activities designed to develop fine motor skills help to prepare children and young people for writing tasks. There are a few examples of children developing early writing skills, progressing from mark-making to simple sentences. A few children and young people can identify letters and create text using digital technology. There is a need to extend the frequency of opportunities to participate in mark-making and writing tasks.

Listening and talking

- A range of communication systems, including signing, switches and objects of reference, are used to support communication and to promote independence. During the course of the inspection, learners were observed listening to instructions and taking turns. Staff understood the specific communication needs of individual children and young people and were responsive

to their needs. There is scope to develop further children's and young people's independence in communication.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Evidence from teachers' planning, individualised educational programmes, and classroom practice indicate that the frequency and content of numeracy and mathematics learning needs to be increased. For a minority of pupils, there are no planned numeracy or mathematics activities. As a result, overall progress in numeracy and mathematics is weak.

Number, money, measure

- During classroom observations, counting was being reinforced across the curriculum in a variety of ways, for example through song, in stories and during physical education. Daily routines provide regular opportunities to learn about the days of the week, and months of the year. A minority of children and young people are learning about coins and money, and have opportunities to use money in real life situations. Young people at the senior phase have an understanding of budgeting through their involvement in enterprise activities. As a result of a lack of consistent teaching and planned learning, not all children and young people are developing an appropriate understanding of money. A minority of children and young people can undertake simple addition, subtraction and multiplication sums. Cooking activities provide opportunities to explore volume and weight.

Shape, position and movement

- Children and young people explore the properties of simple 2D shapes and 3D objects. They can organise 2D shapes by shape and colour. Children and young people explore symmetry through art activities.

Attainment over time

- The school does not yet have reliable data about children's and young people's progress over time. Senior leaders recognise that data relating to children's and young people's progress for last session is unreliable. Having identified a potential new electronic tracking system, senior leaders should ensure that this serves to provide the necessary rigorous and robust tracking of children's and young people's progress over time.
- Individual learning diaries provide evidence that children and young people are making some progress. Analysis of this data by senior leaders has identified the need to develop further the consistency and quality of target-setting across the school. Although a range of attainment data is gathered, greater strategic use of this data is required to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all learners. The implementation of the recently developed quality assurance programme will enable senior leaders to support staff to increase the level of expectation for learners across the school.
- At senior phase, there is an increased number of entries to national accredited awards in session 2018-2019, when compared to 2017-2018. The overall range of unit options has decreased slightly. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people completing National Qualifications units at Level 1. Most young people are working at this level. Fewer young people are being presented for personal achievement awards this session. However, there is an increase in the number of young people completing gold level awards at national level 1 and 2. The majority of young people are expected to achieve Duke of Edinburgh's bronze level. There is a need to increase the range of accredited awards available for young people to achieve.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children's and young people's achievements are recognised and celebrated in a range of ways. Interactive learning diaries, photographic displays, star awards, assemblies and social media are all used to capture and share achievements. A tracking system is in place to record participation at clubs. There is now a need to use this information more strategically to help identify, and address, potential barriers to participation.
- The provision of a range of activities and events is supporting children and young people to develop the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Participation in a number of sporting tournaments and leagues is enabling children and young people to achieve in swimming, football, boccia and curling. The highly motivating and inclusive signing choir enables children, young people and staff to learn together. The weekly choir session provides opportunities for children and young people who are confident in signing to lead activities. Regular performances enable the choir to share their learning with an audience. Young people in the senior phase contribute to the school through their enterprise activities, for example through their Wednesday soup and sandwich café.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have an understanding of children's and young people's complex additional support needs, and their socio-economic background. They work closely with parents and partners to provide support for individuals. PEF has been targeted at providing a range of lunchtime and evening sports clubs, such as tennis, basketball and curling. Only a minority of children and young people access these clubs. Staff should monitor participation and engagement in these activities more closely in order to improve uptake. This will also help to identify children and young people who are at risk of missing out.

Choice of QI: 2.7 Partnerships

- The development and promotion of partnerships
- Collaborative learning and improvement
- Impact on learners

- The school engages well with a range of professional partners, such as physiotherapists, to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Allied health partners work with the school to provide relevant assessments. The school has worked closely with speech and language therapy colleagues to develop communication across the primary school, which is having a positive impact on children. Core vocabulary is becoming increasingly used to support children's and young people's learning. Partners spoke highly of school staff being committed to meeting the needs of children and young people. Partners feel welcomed in the school and have good working relationships with senior leaders and staff.
- The school facilitates visiting specialist and health colleagues to meet with children and young people within the school, which is having a positive impact. For example, paediatrician and dietician clinics are held in the school, rather than in medical environments. This reduces the number of times when children are taken out of school and facilitates medical assessments within a familiar environment.
- Senior phase teachers have engaged with a number of partners to offer a range of experiences to enable young people to develop skills within a motivating and real life context. Young people in the senior phase take part in regular experiences such as dog walking, participating in activities at the local sports venues, using public transport and interacting with staff in a range of shops. The school engages with organisations such as Skills Development Scotland to support the transition of young people to positive destinations. The school should develop more robust partnership agreements to ensure that partnerships are maintained and that meaningful relevant experiences are developed for all learners. Opportunities should be created for partners to be involved in planning and to collaborate more frequently when designing learning experiences for children and young people.
- The school has established good partnership working with other organisations to progress a range of expressive arts projects. This has allowed a minority of children and young people to experience dance, music and drumming.
- Staff are developing trusting and strong relationships with parents. Parents reported feeling very supported by the school. Parents and carers are involved in setting core targets for children and young people during parent and carer meetings. There is scope for the minutes of review meetings to include more useful information to help parents support their child's learning at home. A minority of parents receive regular information, through home school diaries, about their child's progress towards achieving their targets. This regular communication is not consistent across the school. The school should continue to develop approaches to report to parents about the progress children and young people are making. There is also scope to increase parental engagement and to work with parents to enable them to support their child's learning at home. Annual review meetings are held for each learner, following a parent contact evening. Staff should review how discussions at meetings are recorded with more focus on educational progress and next steps.
- Parent groups such as Orchard Brae Connect and Friends of Orchard Brae feel empowered to organise workshops and training events for other parents such as moving and handling, and first aid. This good practice should be continued to allow parents to support each other.

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.