

Summarised inspection findings

Fernhill School

Independent

5 March 2024

Key contextual information

Fernhill School is a co-educational 3-18 Roman Catholic independent school in Rutherglen, South Lanarkshire. At the time of the inspection, there were 180 children and young people across the primary and secondary stages. The school is supported by their chaplain, who is the Parish Priest at St Columbkille's Church in Rutherglen. The school is also supported by Religious Education advisers from the Diocese of Motherwell and the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

The school has a long-standing partnership with South Lanarkshire Council to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. The school's nursery is open 50 weeks per year which helps to meet the needs of local families.

1.3 Leadership of change

very 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

■ Fernhill School is welcoming and nurturing with a strong family feel. In 2022, as part of the school's 50th year celebration events, the headteacher worked in partnership with the whole school community to co-create an aspirational vision and set of values and aims. The headteacher's leadership of this work has been shaped by his informed awareness of current evidence-based research on the importance of values in leading change and improvement. The school's vision has a clear focus on developing learners' awareness as global citizens. The vision and values are based firmly in Gospel values and provide a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school. The values of confidence, courage, compassion and commitment are evident in the life of the school, and in daily interactions between staff, children and young people. The values are clearly understood by all and supported across the Fernhill School community, including its partners. There is a shared commitment across the school community to celebrate and reward children and young people when they demonstrate the values in action.

■ The headteacher and promoted staff have a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and have identified key areas for further development. Last academic year, senior leaders and staff worked co-operatively to improve a wide range of areas of the school's work. This included curriculum development, aspects of learning and teaching, and school administrative functions. Working groups of staff have taken responsibility for leading these areas of work. This year, as a result of evaluating the pace of change, the senior leadership team have identified a smaller number of priorities to take forward. These are developing further a whole-school digital strategy, implementing a new information management system and refreshing the curriculum for health and wellbeing. This focused approach is helping staff to measure more easily their success and progress in securing improvements. The school has appropriate plans in place to continue to build on stakeholders' views in deciding aspects for future development.

- Senior leaders carry out a range of quality assurance activities across the school year to check on standards of attainment and the quality of learning and teaching. Across the school, staff have a clear understanding of the importance of self-evaluation and are developing their skills in monitoring and evaluating change. Senior leaders should proceed as planned to share best practice in the use of self-evaluation for improvement that already exists within the staff team.
- Governors provide a well-judged blend of strategic guidance and practical advice for school leaders. There is an ethos of mutual respect between governors and school staff, which helps the school to continuously improve. Governors have a clear, long-term vision for the future of the school. This includes workforce planning and embedding strategies to promote staff's health and wellbeing. For example, governors are supportive of staff's requests for flexible working patterns and encourage opportunities for leadership experience among staff. This is helping to retain a hardworking, positive and committed staff team at Fernhill School.
- The headteacher has a strong collaborative approach to leadership and school improvement. He encourages all staff to take on areas of responsibility and to develop their own leadership skills. This results in a positive culture of empowerment and trust, where staff are supported to lead on school improvement. The headteacher is ably supported by the team of promoted staff, who each lead their respective teams very well. As a senior leadership team, they work strongly together and willingly provide individual coaching and mentoring to members of staff. This is helping to build the leadership capacity of individuals, and collectively as a staff team. Senior leaders are in the process of embedding a new management information system. This will help transform how senior leaders and staff use the data they gather to measure improvement and plan the curriculum.
- Heads of departments and heads of houses are leading change effectively in their respective subject areas, faculties and year groups. They cite positive impact of recent changes that allow them to share practice with one another on a more regular basis. They are appreciative of time set aside to engage in professional dialogue on the core business of learning and teaching. This has been facilitated by the working time agreement that supports collegiate working and sharing of good practice. Departmental staff meet on a regular basis to discuss evidence gathered from self-evaluation activities. Heads of department are keen to build on this and to share good aspects of school practice and provision across departments.
- The headteacher and promoted staff facilitate a very supportive working environment in which people share a sense of responsibility to improve the quality of their work. Staff, alongside senior leaders, make decisions together that are in the best interests of learners. They are successfully leading approaches that result in young people feeling included in the life and work of the school. Senior leaders provide all teachers with opportunities to lead change by including them in the decision-making process and empowering them to make decisions. For example, teachers lead whole-school working groups on outdoor learning, the school's digital strategy and Fairtrade. Each group's work is aligned closely to the school improvement plan and has its own action plan, with clear outcomes and implementation processes.
- Teachers benefit from a rich and varied programme of professional learning opportunities. They welcome the recently strengthened and structured approach to professional review and development, which is aligned closely to the General Teaching Council for Scotland standards. This enables all staff to reflect regularly on their own practice, and to recognise their own strengths and areas for development. This reinvigorated approach to tailored professional learning is supporting staff to successfully lead change.
- Across the primary and secondary stages, children and young people are provided with meaningful and relevant opportunities to act as agents of change. This includes in their roles

as ambassadors, champions, buddies and mentors and in their engagement in a variety of pupil councils and committees. Many of these groups are pupil-led, with very little adult direction. A next step is to explore new ways to communicate the results of consultative exercises and the work of the various committees to all learners.

- Parents play an important role in the life the school. The Parent Council includes parent representatives from across the diverse school community. The headteacher values and welcomes the input of Parent Council members to the revision of policies and on topical school issues. The Parent Council is clear about its role in supporting the school to achieve its vision and to living the values in action. The Parent Teacher Association raise significant funds for the school and nursery. They help to promote the school's approaches to equity by organising the stock of pre-loved school uniforms and supporting local and national charities. Almost all parents say that the school is well led and managed, and that staff know children very well as individuals. Almost all parents say that their children enjoy coming to school and that they would feel comfortable approaching staff with any questions, concerns or suggestions.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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

- The school community places a strong emphasis on promoting values. These values support and encourage a very positive ethos and caring environment. They set clear expectations for children and young people. Children and young people are proud of their school and describe the 'family feel' of the whole school community as a key feature that helps them to learn. Staff know learners very well as individuals.
- Across the school, pupil-led groups are a positive feature of learners' engagement and participation. All children and young people are encouraged to play an active role in the wider life of the school and community. Young people in S6 lead the very successful Fairtrade group. The pupil council is leading the way for the school's work towards becoming an accredited rights respecting school. At the secondary stages, young people's strengths are matched to developing a wide range of planned leadership opportunities. All children in Transitus (P7 class) are given the opportunity to lead an area of responsibility. This includes being digital leaders, eco leaders or a member of the pupil council. In Transitus, children apply for these positions, reflecting on the skills and qualities required for each role. Prefects in S6 carry out the interviews for the positions. At all levels, this is developing children and young people's skills for learning, life and work.
- Throughout the school, children and teachers use individual tablets and laptops well in class to support learning. There is scope to develop further the skills of teachers at the secondary stages in the effective use of digital technology to enhance learning. Children in P4 to S6 benefit from volunteering to be digital leaders. As digital leaders, they keep themselves up to date with new digital developments and support their peers in a variety of formats. For example, they assist in class lessons, planned workshops, and showcase their skills online. This is developing children's and young people's technological and leadership skills very effectively in a meaningful context.
- Overall, across the school, standards of learning and teaching are consistently high. In almost all lessons, children and young people focus on their learning very well and are keen to achieve. Teachers provide regular, personalised support for children and young people during lessons and at other points in the school day. At the senior secondary stages, young people speak very highly of the support that they receive from their teachers. They feel that classrooms are warm and nurturing environments for learning, with informative displays that support their work.
- Teachers have developed a shared understanding of what well-structured and effective lessons look like. In almost all lessons, teachers share quality learning intentions and success criteria to clarify the purpose of learning and how learners can measure success. In almost all classes, teachers give clear explanations and instructions and use questioning well to check children's

and young people's understanding. There is scope for teachers to develop further their use of questioning to encourage all children and young people to develop and apply higher-order thinking skills. Almost all teachers check for understanding well during lessons, using a variety of approaches, including 'show-me' boards, exit passes and digital response codes to motivate learners.

- Teachers' use of the local environment and community as a stimulus for learning is a strength of the school. All primary aged children take part in a wide variety of planned, successful outdoor learning experiences based at Fernbrae Meadows. These activities include learning from the Countryside Ranger and working with members of the local community for craft sessions and campfires. In addition, high numbers of children from P6 to S2 participate in the Junior Award Scheme Scotland. Children and young people also benefit from visits to partnership sporting clubs, theatre visits and trips to the wider and local community. These rich experiences enhance children's and young people's learning experiences within and beyond the classroom.
- Across the school, all teachers have one-to-one learning conversations with children and young people. These learning conversations are recorded in jotters and pupils' work. This consistent approach helps children to understand their own progress across their learning. Almost all children and young people can articulate confidently their next steps for improvement.
- At the primary stages, senior leaders have taken positive action to review and update the assessment approaches for literacy and numeracy to take into better account a wider range of children's knowledge and skills. As a result, teachers are developing a clear picture of children's progression in learning across these subject areas. Teachers have appropriate plans in place to continue to develop assessment approaches for all other areas of the curriculum.
- At the secondary stages, teachers use a variety of summative and formative assessment methods very effectively. These include carrying out class tests, planning for self- and peer-assessment activities and providing detailed feedback for individual learners during learning conversations. Teachers across subject areas engage in moderation activity within their departments to ensure a shared understanding of national standards and expectations. A few teachers undertake moderation activities with teachers from other schools.
- At the primary stages, staff maintain detailed records of children's progress and attainment in spelling, writing, numeracy and mathematics. This information is reviewed by the headteacher and teachers during regular tracking meetings. At these meetings, staff review individual children's progress and identify those exceeding expectations or those in need of extra support. From this, teachers identify appropriate interventions and challenge for individuals. At the primary stages, teachers share monthly detailed reports for each individual child with parents. These personalised reports summarise children's attainment, effort and home learning particularly well. They also provide a cohesive overview of the skills and knowledge that children are developing across the curriculum.
- At the secondary stages, each department has developed a system to track and monitor the progress of young people. Teachers have agreed that a more consistent approach to recording, tracking and monitoring across the secondary subject departments would enhance the outcomes for young people. Senior leaders are at early stages of implementing a new management information system, which will support this development.

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

very 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

- Across the school, staff recognise that positive, encouraging relationships and a nurturing ethos are central to developing a whole-school approach to wellbeing. All staff and partners have a shared understanding of their individual and collective responsibilities in promoting children's and young people's wellbeing. Staff achieve this through a targeted and very effective programme of professional development. As a result, almost all children and young people feel they have adults in school they can talk to if they need help or advice. Across the school, almost all children and young people feel that staff know them very well as individuals and respond promptly to any concerns and anxieties.
- All staff and partners feel valued, supported and involved in decision-making processes. Staff's strong partnership working with a range of key agencies and health professionals leads to prompt identification of any health, social, emotional or learning needs that may arise. As a result, almost all children and young people receive the right kind of help when they need it. Across the school, learners' attendance remains high and there have been no exclusions in recent years. Staff's individualised and nurturing approaches ensure that young people who transferred to Fernhill School having previously found accessing school difficult, are now attending school regularly. These young people are now progressing very well in their learning and feel they have become more confident at Fernhill School.
- Across the school, staff have high expectations of children and young people's behaviour and conduct. Almost all children and young people live up to these expectations. At all stages, almost all children and young people demonstrate responsible behaviour, caring attitudes and pride in their learning. There is a strong sense of community across the school. Staff pay very good attention to learners' health and wellbeing through progressive opportunities at all stages to engage in a wide range of activities and physical pursuits. This includes swimming, tennis, golf, outdoor learning, walking and rugby. Staff are successful in raising learners' awareness of healthy lifestyles, including road safety, substance misuse and internet safety. During the annual health week, staff and learners of all ages participate together in an extensive programme of motivating activities and taster sessions aimed to promote positive health and wellbeing. A high proportion of staff and young people learn important skills for life, such as basic first aid and how to use a defibrillator. This sits alongside opportunities for staff and pupils alike to try out new pursuits such as yoga and dance.
- Through the taught curriculum and the wider life of the school, children and young people are becoming increasingly mindful of the impact that choices can have on their future outcomes. For example, they understand the benefits of being physically active on a regular basis; cooking and eating healthy food; recognising the importance of assessing risk and taking appropriate action to keep themselves and others safe. The whole school community are

working together to refresh the curriculum programme for personal and social education. An innovative feature of this work is the key input of the safeguarding governance committee, who lead children and young people through active dialogue sessions called 'Being Heard'. In this way, learners of all ages are directly influencing their curriculum in relation to their own health and wellbeing concerns and priorities.

- A significant number of senior pupils provide positive role models for other children and young people as mental health ambassadors. Others promote active and healthy lifestyles by coaching and mentoring younger pupils in a range of sporting activities. Children and young people at all stages make the most of the many after school and community sporting activities. These are very well supported by a large group of staff and community partners.
- Children and young people have appropriate opportunities to reflect on and practice their religious beliefs with support from the school chaplain. This includes bespoke religious instruction for the Roman Catholic community, links with local churches and visitors, and regular religious and moral education lessons. At assemblies and in lessons, children and young people have opportunities to learn about different faiths, which helps them to develop their awareness of diversity.
- Staff have a secure understanding of their statutory requirements and national codes of practice. Senior leaders and partners follow due processes carefully to explore children's and young people's entitlements. Wherever necessary, they create individual support plans that acknowledge children's and young people's rights, taking account of learners' and parents' views.
- All staff ensure that children and young people who require additional support for learning get the help they need to make very good progress in their learning. Staff benefit from participating in a range of high-quality, ongoing professional learning to help them meet the needs of all learners within their classes. This includes courses and bespoke training on specific areas of learning support, for example dyslexia and autism spectrum disorder. Staff seek advice and support actively from external partners when they need more information about the best way to support individual learners. As a result, children and young people who require additional help feel included in the reassuring and supportive learning environments that teachers create. Staff and pupils value and recognise diversity within the school and community through raising awareness of disability and cultural differences.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very 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

Fernhill School is non-selective, in that children and young people are not routinely asked to pass an entrance test before being offered a place at the school. Across the primary and secondary stages, a significant minority of children and young people require some additional support in their learning. At all stages, those learners are very well supported by teachers and make strong progress towards their individual targets.

Primary Stages

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy is good, and in numeracy it is very good. A few children across the primary stages exceed expected standards. Teachers use Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) guidance to plan learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers track children's progress very well across almost all aspects of literacy and numeracy. A next step is to review how children's reading skills are assessed, to ensure they are making the best possible progress.

Attainment in literacy

Listening and talking

- Children speak confidently about the skills and knowledge that they develop during their time at school. Most younger children listen well and follow their teacher's instructions. A few children need support to develop further their listening skills in groups. Almost all children in P3 and P4 ask and answer questions with confidence. A few need support to ensure that everyone has opportunities to contribute. Children at Transitus are highly articulate. They talk with confidence and expression. They demonstrate a high level of interest and enthusiasm when talking to adults and other children.

Reading

- At the early stages of primary, most children are progressing well with their reading. They use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns well to read words. At the middle stages, most children enjoy reading. They explain well their preferences for texts and authors. The majority of children identify the main ideas in a book and describe characters and setting. All children recognise the key features of fiction and non-fiction texts. At Transitus, almost all children understand and use reading strategies, such as scanning texts to find key information. Most children recognise aspects of figurative language in texts they read, for example, metaphors and similes. They should continue to be supported to extend their knowledge in this area.

Writing

- At the early stages, all children attempt to spell simple words using their knowledge of sounds and letters. They use capital letters and full stops correctly to write simple sentences. At the middle stages, almost all children write well for a range of purposes. They demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary, conjunctions, punctuation and paragraphs effectively to support their writing. At Transitus, children use knowledge of genre, structure and style to write well for a range of purposes and audiences. They apply their knowledge of spelling strategies to spell most words correctly. All children are encouraged to review and edit their writing to ensure it is legible and technically accurate.

Attainment in numeracy at the primary stages

Number, money and measure

- Across the primary stages, almost all children show a secure understanding in number processes and place value. Almost all children said they enjoy mathematics and almost all are making very good progress.
- Almost all children at P1 identify and recognise numbers from 0 to 20. Almost all add and subtract within ten and use ordinal numbers accurately in real-life contexts. At P2, children are confident in number, solving addition problems with three-digit whole numbers and subtraction problems with two-digit whole numbers. Almost all children tell the time using half past on an analogue clock. By P3, children tell the time using quarter past and quarter to on an analogue clock. At P4, all children identify and use coins and notes confidently to £20. Most children can use a variety of coin and note combinations to pay for items. They give change accurately within £10. The majority estimate the length of everyday objects accurately. At Transitus, children are confident in adding and subtracting whole numbers, decimal fractions and negative numbers. As a next step, children would benefit from additional work on equivalent forms of common fractions, decimal fractions and percentages to solve problems. Almost all children have a sound understanding of the benefits and risks of using bank cards and digital technologies. For example, they calculate annual percentage rates to estimate how much credit card borrowing will cost over a year.

Shape, position and movement

- All children in P1 identify and name two-dimensional shapes accurately. In P2, the majority of children identify symmetry in pictures and two-dimensional shapes. In P3, almost all children use mathematical language to describe the properties of a range of common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. By Transitus, almost all children use mathematical language accurately including identifying a range of angles in the environment. As a next step, children in Transitus would benefit from carrying out problem-solving activities, which involve calculating the perimeter and area of two-dimensional shapes.

Information handling

- Children in P1 are developing the skills to sort information using tally marks. By P4, all children accurately explain the purpose of presenting data in a bar chart. All children in Transitus demonstrate a range of ways to present data, for example on average temperatures.

Secondary stages

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

S1-2

- Young people attain well in literacy and numeracy in S1-2, including those who require additional support with their learning. Almost all young people's learning progresses very well to mainly National 5 qualifications. Teachers track literacy and numeracy using national Benchmarks at a similar level to CfE third level. They are raising attainment through careful course planning and planning interventions that add value and interest to young people's learning. These include mathematical challenges, reading for pleasure and peer support. All staff should increase their role for integrating numeracy and literacy across the curriculum. This would afford young people more opportunities to apply their numeracy and literacy skills across a range of areas.
- In 2022-23, 13 young people in S2 achieved a Modern Languages Life and Work Award at SCQF level three and four. Young people's literacy and language skills are developed by completing this award, as well as self-awareness, confidence, leadership and independent learning.

S3-6

- Over time, all young people leave Fernhill School with an award in literacy, and in numeracy. This is achieved through undertaking courses in English and mathematics. Young people's attainment is strong. This includes young people who have additional support needs.
- In 2021/22 and 2022/23, all young people in S4 attained a qualification in mathematics. The majority of young people in S4 attained a National Qualification in mathematics at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level five or better. During the same time period, almost all young people in S4 attained a National Qualification in English at SCQF level five or better. The school's attainment is consistently above the national average in mathematics and English.
- Almost all young people remain in school beyond S4. Young people's attainment in English and mathematics at SCQF level six or better is strong and above the national average. In 2022/23, almost all young people in S5 who were presented for Higher English attained the qualification. During the same time period, all young people in S5 who were presented for mathematics achieved a Higher pass at grade A-B. This is an improvement on the previous year.

Attainment over time

Primary

- Across the primary stages, teachers are developing effective ways to track children's attainment over time for literacy and numeracy. A next step is to gather data on children's attainment across other curriculum areas over time. Going forward, this would help teachers to illustrate more clearly the breadth and depth of children's learning and attainment as they move through the stages of the school.

Secondary stages

- Across S1-2, teachers gather data on young people's attainment across curriculum areas. Teachers use a range of assessments, including end of year examinations to monitor progress and attainment. Senior leaders are planning to create an award bespoke to the school that captures young people's achievements in subjects, co-curricular activities, outwith school and their values in action. Teachers' regular monitoring of progress assists in ensuring that young people are achieving to expectations.
- Senior leaders are implementing digital applications that will assist them to have a more systematic overview of all young people's progress and attainment as they move through the school. This will increase teachers' analysis of quality data and enable interventions, and other curriculum adjustments, to be put in place quickly.
- In S4, and by S5 and S6 across SCQF levels five, six and seven, young people's attainment is strong. Almost all young people attain courses at grade A to C passes across levels and subjects. Young people are encouraged to study the maximum number of subjects available to them.
- Young people in P7 to S6 achieve additional national awards and diplomas in music for clarinet, piano, saxophone and violin. Young people achieve these awards routinely with merit and distinction.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Across the school, children and young people are encouraged strongly to engage in a range of opportunities to ensure a breadth of participation, both in and out of school. The school actively recognises and celebrates children and young people's achievements, including recognition at national levels. Children and young people's participation in wider aspects of school life is recognised in informative and engaging visual displays. This reinforces the school ethos that encourages ambition and celebrates success.
- Across the school, children and young people contribute to the life and work of their community through their faith. For example, all children in Transitus achieve the Pope Francis Award. By S6, a few young people achieve the Caritas Award. As part of this award, young people develop important skills and empathy related to giving back to the community through charity work. Young people choose a local charity to support each year. They also volunteer in the local community to assist those who are vulnerable and facing disadvantage. This includes older people with dementia and families affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
- Young people's leadership skills are developed through numerous additional volunteering opportunities. These are recognised through young people achieving awards, such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Young people's and staff's work to support the environment has been recognised through accreditation as a Fairtrade school, and through Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag accreditation.

Equity for All

- All young people move on to a positive initial destination on leaving school. In 2022/23, most young people went on to higher education. A minority of young people go to further education or employment. Young people are supported very well in making choices for their future careers. This includes access to careers education, high-quality advice and opportunities to experience work.

- Senior leaders promote an equitable school experience for all children and young people. They make very good use of their knowledge of the individual circumstances of children and young people. This ensures that learners receive the support they need to participate fully in the life of the school. Senior leaders have raised attainment by increasing the courses available to include National Qualifications at SCQF levels three and four, as well as recently introducing Foundation Apprenticeships. Senior leaders have nurtured important partnerships with nearby schools to assist in meeting young people's personalised needs in learning, qualifications, interests and achievements. Young people have access to a wide range of additional study support to help address any barriers in learning. This ensures that young people are progressing at the right pace.

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.