Summarised inspection findings

Saltersgate School

Midlothian Council

26 September 2023

Key contextual information

Saltersgate School is a non-denominational all-through special school located in Dalkeith. The school supports children and young people with a range of complex needs from across Midlothian Council. At the time of inspection, the school roll is 104 children and young people, 63 in primary and 41 in secondary. The majority of learners reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 3, 4 and 5. 34% of children and young people at the school qualify for free school meals.

The school has faced significant staffing turnover and absences over the last two years. In the last year, there have been a number of acting senior leaders in place. A new headteacher was appointed in May 2023 and a new depute head will take up post in August 2023.

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	

■ Staff have developed a calm, caring and nurturing learning environment across the school. All children and young people enjoy trusting relationships with adults. As a result, children and young people settle well in class each day and feel safe. Staff interactions with learners are sensitive and responsive. If a child or young person becomes anxious or distressed, staff are adept in supporting them to regulate their behaviour and reengage quickly with their learning.

■ Across the school, almost all children and young people engage purposefully in learning experiences. Children and young people respond well to familiar routines and structured learning activities, including practical tasks, learning outdoors and desk-based activities. Children and young people transition smoothly between activities, responding well to any planned changes. A few children and young people would benefit from working more independently. Staff should introduce more ways for children and young people to work alongside their peers in small groups. This would support children and young people to develop further their independence and collaborative working skills.

■ In most lessons, teachers use a range of effective teaching strategies to help motivate and engage children and young people in their learning. They use well timed praise, provide helpful feedback and ask appropriate questions. This helps children and young people to understand the purpose of their learning and how they can be successful. Senior leaders should work more closely with teachers to build on this good practice and establish high quality learning and teaching consistently across the school.

■ In most lessons, children and young people are engaged in motivating tasks and activities set at the appropriate level of challenge. Staff provide children and young people with high-quality opportunities for personalisation and choice within learning activities. A minority of children and young people are not challenged sufficiently in their learning at times. Teachers now need to

ensure that all learning activities are age appropriate and differentiated appropriately to meet the needs of all children.

■ Across the school, teachers use visual timetables, signing and objects well to support children and young people's understanding of routines and learning activities. In most classes, staff use digital communication technology effectively to support identified children and young people to engage well in communication exchanges. Communication devices and tablets are also used effectively to scaffold and model communication interactions. Most staff provide children using digital technology with sufficient time to process information and make a response. This supports learners well to make choices, express their views and develop social interactions.

■ Staff are at the early stages of developing learning through play. In a few classes, staff provide play-based learning opportunities. A few children have access to structured play activities and are beginning to explore, discover and problem solve in more playful ways. Across the school, outdoor play spaces have been developed well to provide increased opportunities for children to engage in energetic and sensory based free play. Children are motivated by these spaces and enjoy spinning, climbing and jumping on play equipment. Teachers and early years practitioners should continue to develop approaches to play across the school, taking account of national guidance.

■ Staff know children and young people well. Most staff use information in 'placement profiles' effectively to help understand the needs, communication styles and preferences of all children and young people. In order to strengthen this practice, senior leaders should ensure all staff use placemats consistently well, especially at key transition times.

■ All children and young people have an individualised educational programme (IEP) that identifies very well any barriers to learning faced by learners in relation to wellbeing, communication and independence. All IEPs contain bespoke strategies personalised to each individual learner. Targets are agreed in partnership with parents and reviewed regularly. Staff use information in IEPs well to support children and young people's learning. In a few classes, targets are displayed in the classroom. Staff now need to ensure that learning targets provide sufficient challenge for all children and young people.

■ Young people in the senior phase have meaningful opportunities to take on leadership roles such as being a prefect or library assistant. Young people also take lead roles on school initiatives such as recycling. Young people enjoy these opportunities. They can articulate how these roles help them to be active participants in the life and work of the school. This is scope to increase the range of leadership opportunities available to allow more children and young people to be more actively involved in the life of the school.

■ Across the school, teachers and early years practitioners assess accurately children and young people's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They use IEPs effectively to support assessment and identify children and young people's next steps. In the senior phase, teachers are confident in assessing young people's progress and achievements in National Qualification units. Within the broad general education (BGE), teachers are at the early stages of using foundational milestones, milestones and benchmarks to help assess children and young people's progress and achievement across the curriculum. Senior leaders now need to provide all teachers with continued support in making professional judgements about working within and through a Curriculum for Excellence level. In taking this forward, senior leaders should increase opportunities for teachers to engage in moderation activities across the school and with colleagues from other schools.

■ Across the BGE, teachers are using a range of frameworks to plan learning and monitor and track children and young people's progress and achievements. In the senior phase, teachers are using planning frameworks more consistently to ensure learning is cohesive and progressive. As planned, senior leaders should now implement a whole school tracking and monitoring system to ensure that children and young people build on prior learning across all curriculum areas.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

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, most children and young people are making good progress in literacy and English. A few are making very good progress. Most children and young people are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few are making good progress. Across literacy and numeracy, a number of children and young people could attain more. With the introduction of systems to track and monitor progress and attainment, staff will be better placed to identify areas of literacy and numeracy where children and young people could attain even better.

Attainment in literacy and English

■ Overall, most children and young people are making good progress in literacy and English. A few children and young people are making very good progress.

Listening and talking

■ Across the school, almost all children and young people are making good progress in their listening and talking. A few children are making very good progress. Children and young people are making good use of a range of approaches to communicate and express their choices and views. Children and young people who are able to communicate verbally, do so well. For some, they use speech, skilfully supported by communication aids. A significant number of children and young people use pictures to communicate. They do this very well with varying levels of support from staff, depending on their ability. A few children use sign language, including on-body sign, well to communicate. Almost all children and young people are supported to listen and interact appropriately with their peers. Children and young people are able to listen to staff and follow instructions. Children and young people working at early level milestones listen and respond to different words and phrases appropriately. They use single words to communicate. Across the school, children and young people use their chosen methods of communication effectively to greet adults and visitors.

■ At all stages, and depending on their strengths and needs, children and young people are using technology successfully for language and communication. Tablets with voice output applications and eye activated programmes are used well by children and young people.

Reading

■ Almost all children and young people are making good progress in their reading. Most children and young people identify initial sounds in words and match words correctly to pictures. Almost all children and young people engage well in books and novels. Children at early level milestones respond positively to visual timetables. A few children show good awareness to objects used in sensory stories through facial expressions and gesture. They Identify pictures or symbols successfully to understand their daily activities. Children and

young people at early level show awareness of books and make choices about stories they like. They demonstrate good levels of enjoyment and engagement to stories that are read aloud. Children and young people at early level read text fluently. A few are able to identify what books are about and describe the qualities of the main characters.

- Almost all children and young people are reading well words and sentences used within their environment. They are able to read and match words with objects that are relevant and meaningful to them. Most children and young people are reading signs and labels well within local shops in order to make lists, purchase items and follow recipes or instructions.

Writing
- Almost all children and young people are making satisfactory progress in writing. Children at early level milestones are interested in mark making and a few are able to produce marks. At early level, children and young people form lowercase letters legibly, some with support. A few children and young people are beginning to use capital letters and a full stop in their writing. A few are able to spell common words accurately. A few children are using digital technology well to support their writing. They use programmes to help them create sentences, stories and answer questions. Children and young people could make further progress in their writing. Teachers should make better use of digital technology to help children and young people translate their thoughts and ideas into writing.

Attainment in numeracy and mathematics
- Overall, most children and young people are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children and young people are making good progress. Children and young people would benefit greatly from more opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in new and unfamiliar contexts.

Number, money and measure
- Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones participate in nursery rhymes and songs, which involve an introduction to number. They show an awareness of the sequence of numbers to five and use numbers well within the classroom environment. At early level, most children and young people know the days of the week and the months of the year. They are able to follow a sequence of events well such as their visual timetables. A few children and young people recognise numbers from zero to 20 and identify the number before and the number after. At early level, most children and young people are using measure in everyday activities such as baking. A few are comparing the size of objects using everyday language such as bigger and smaller. Most children and young people engage with money through life skills such as shopping and cooking. Most children and young people working at the early stages of milestones exchange an item for something else. Children and young people working at the upper levels of milestones can sort coins from other coins. Children and young people could strengthen their understanding of money. At early level, a few children and young people explain well what a fraction is and give examples of dividing objects into halves and quarters. They use the correct notation for common fractions.

Shape, position and movement
- Most children and young people at all stages take part to varying degrees in activities and games that develop the use of positional language and concepts of movement, position, strength, speed and direction. At early level, children and young people categorise and sort two-dimensional shapes by size and shape. They match objects and shapes by colour. A few children are exploring and comparing different objects by size. A minority of children are able to test shapes to fit within practical and digital puzzles. A majority of children and young people are not yet confident in exploring the properties of two-dimensional shapes and

three-dimensional objects. They need to understand further the properties of shape through play and real-life situations.

Attainment over time

■ Based on data and evidence provided by the school, the majority of children and young people at the BGE make satisfactory progress with their learning and engagement over time. A minority of children and young people are making good progress. However, not all children and young people are achieving their full potential. Senior leaders and staff are not yet confident in identifying children and young people who could achieve more. School tracking systems do not provide reliable information to track children and young people's attainment and progress over time. Senior leaders and staff now need to ensure that they analyse data and evidence of children and young people's progress over time more robustly. In doing so, senior leaders and staff will be more able to focus on improving children and young people's attainment and progress.

■ Teachers have had very few opportunities to engage in meaningful moderation activities. As a result, moderation is not informing teachers' professional judgements of children and young people's progress in the BGE. Senior leaders need to build links with neighbouring schools to help establish systematic moderation activities. This will help teachers improve their confidence in making professional judgements on how well children and young people are progressing with their learning.

■ Since 2021, most young people in the senior phase have gained a large number of National Qualifications units, predominantly at National 1. They successfully achieved awards across a range of curriculum areas including literacy, numeracy, science, physical education and social subjects. However, a minority of learners could have achieved more. In developing the curriculum, teachers need to provide young people with more opportunities to gain National 2 and National 3 awards.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

■ Across the school, children and young people's participation in personal achievement activities is widely recognised and celebrated. Learners' achievements are shared through digital platforms, weekly assemblies, certificates and school displays. Children and young people are proud of their achievements.

■ Senior leaders and staff are successfully establishing community links to provide learners with more personal achievement activities. Children and young people participate enthusiastically in school trips to sites of interest and visits to local businesses. A few learners in the senior phase successfully complete work placements. As a result, children and young people are building skills in sustainability and citizenship. They also develop resilience and strengthen their skills in communication and working with others. Senior leaders and staff should build on this promising start and continue to identify further personal achievement activities for learners of all ages. They should also start to track the skills children and young people are developing through their participation in these activities. This will help children and young people to identify better the skills they are learning and reflect on their own progress.

■ The school had no school leavers in 2022. In 2023, all young people have a positive post-school destination in place. Supported by a range of community partners, staff provide young people with high-quality enhanced transition programmes. Staff recognise the importance of building young people's life skills and employability skills. Young people participate well in work placements, volunteering and visits to potential colleges and adult education centres. This helps build young people's confidence in moving on successfully

upon leaving school. As a next step, staff should support young people to appreciate the skills they are developing to help them achieve success as young adults.

Equity for all learners

■ Senior leaders and staff have a detailed understanding of the range and complexity of children and young people's needs at the school. They provide equitable support which helps children and young people access learning better. Senior leaders have used Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide additional staffing and resources to support children and families to overcome barriers to learning. Senior leaders now need to track the success of targeted interventions carefully. This will help senior leaders to monitor and evaluate the progress of identified children and young people. This includes evidencing improvements for those children and young people most affected by poverty.

Other relevant evidence

■ Across the school, staff are reflective about their practice and are committed to improving their professional skills and knowledge to improve outcomes for all learners. Senior leaders should continue to review professional learning offers and ensure that all staff have the skill set to meet the individual holistic needs of all learners.

■ Senior leaders and staff are at the early stages of developing a rationale for the curriculum based on the unique context of Saltersgate School. They need to review and refresh the school curriculum to meet better learners' needs and aspirations. Senior leaders and staff should develop a curriculum that is more relevant and age appropriate for learners. Senior leaders and staff should also ensure that the curriculum is more cohesive and progressive, allowing children and young people to build on their prior learning and achievements.

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.