

Summarised inspection findings

St Thomas RC Primary School and Nursery Class

Moray Council

28 July 2020

Key contextual information

St. Thomas RC Primary School and Nursery is a denominational school, which serves Keith and the surrounding area in Moray. It forms part of the Keith Associated School Group along with Botriphnie Primary, Crossroads Primary, Keith Primary, Newmill Primary, Rothiemay Primary and Keith Grammar School. There are currently 63 children in the primary school and 18 in the nursery. There have been recent changes in staff and leadership, but the school's staffing is now more settled.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

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 current headteacher, in post since April 2019, provides much needed stability to the school. She has gained the trust of most parents and children. The headteacher demonstrates a calm, firm and empathetic leadership style. She is deeply committed to improving the school. Her strong, strategic leadership and direction are showing early signs of impact on many aspects of the work of the school. The pace of change since her appointment has been significant, yet well judged by the headteacher.
- After a period of instability in staffing, the headteacher is now establishing a staff team of very recently appointed teachers, who work together closely with pupil support assistants. Almost all staff respond well to the headteacher's leadership style and work effectively together, particularly to support the individual pastoral needs of children. They understand the socio-economic context of the school and are committed to providing a nurturing and caring school environment where all children and their families are valued and respected. All staff are keen to improve their professional practice. This session, they have been undertaking a range of relevant professional learning, guided by the headteacher. This is a focused and sensible approach to professional learning which supports school improvement priorities.
- The headteacher recognises the need to empower staff, children and partners in delivering aspects of school improvement. She has begun to shape change in collaboration with them. For example, the recently refreshed values which include respect, positive attitudes and community, were designed in collaboration with children, staff and parents. They are aligned clearly with Gospel values and are intended to act as key drivers for change and improvement in the school. As already identified in the school improvement plan, ongoing engagement with staff, children and partners of the school is required. This will embed the values in the daily life and interactions across the school community. Over the last year, the headteacher has rightly prioritised establishing a positive relationships policy.
- Ongoing self-evaluation involving all staff, stakeholders and partners is at an early stage. In conjunction with the recently revised values, the headteacher has identified the planned revision of the vision and curriculum rationale as a sound platform to ensure a common understanding across the whole school community of what and how children will learn and how

they can make connections across their learning. The headteacher also recognises the need to create a strong focus on developing the school's ambition for its children and higher expectations of children's achievements. Positive signs of impact are emerging in the development of a few areas identified in the school improvement plan, such as the use of progression frameworks and nurturing approaches. However these are still at a very early stage of implementation. There is a need to ensure that focused, robust, evidence-based judgements about the impact of planned improvements are made, so that change is planned for and leads to improvements in children's attainment.

- The headteacher has introduced an annual calendar to support monitoring children's progress and staff have made an early start to tracking children's progress in literacy and numeracy. The headteacher has also begun to review attainment with staff at regular points across the year. Staff should now take a more focused approach to evaluating the impact of change on outcomes for children and provide appropriately ambitious targets for children. As planned, teachers should develop and improve approaches to moderation. This will help to raise expectations in line with national standards and increase teachers' confidence in making robust judgements about Curriculum for Excellence levels. Staff make use of Pupil Equity Funding to provide a range of effective time-limited interventions, often delivered by the skilled support staff. These are having a positive impact on the 'readiness to learn' of a few targeted children.
- There are a number of opportunities for children to engage in leadership activity. This includes participating in the pupil council. School staff have recognised that there is a need to promote pupil voice further and to offer children more independence in their learning and in contributing to school life. As a result, the school has introduced a sports council and a young leaders of learning council. Children speak positively about the increasing opportunities they have to contribute to school improvement.
- The school, effectively supported by the Parent Council, has forged productive partnerships with local community businesses. They supported a recent 'world of work week' to help children begin to recognise and develop necessary skills for their future lives.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

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 recently introduced school values reflect the school's commitment to developing and maintaining a positive ethos within the school and its community. All staff know the children well, seeking opportunities to learn more about them as individuals. Staff are well placed to use their positive relationships to develop and support children's resilience and motivation to learn. Nurture and restorative approaches are at the early stages of supporting and encouraging positive behaviour across the school. All staff must now have higher expectations of children's behaviour.
- In most lessons, children are taught as a whole class. In a few lessons, teachers plan children's tasks to take into account the support required for individuals and groups. However, too few children are engaged and independent in their learning. In a few lessons, children are off task and fail to complete an appropriate standard of work. The majority of children report they feel they do not work hard enough. Most often, learning is differentiated by level of support and by outcome. Staff should now take prompt action to use the draft progression pathways to plan progressive, challenging learning to meet the needs of groups and individuals.
- The quality of teaching across the school is insufficiently strong. Teachers use a variety of tasks and activities in their lessons, most of which are appropriately resourced. However, the pace of learning throughout planned lessons is often not appropriate, preventing children from achieving their full potential. Teachers must ensure that children are provided with adequate time to consolidate and apply learning and ensure that all class time is put to best possible use.
- The majority of teachers give clear explanation and instructions. They should now discuss with children the importance of listening to instructions and developing appropriate 'learning behaviours'. This will support children to take more ownership and responsibility for their learning. Children do not yet understand exactly what it is they are learning and how they will know they have been successful.
- A number of well-timed interventions have been employed to support children's progress and confidence in literacy. Support staff are deployed effectively and lead these initiatives well. However, overall, children lack sufficient opportunities to develop their literacy skills. The teaching of writing requires an increased focus to ensure improvement across all levels. Teachers need to increase expectations of what children achieve in writing across the school. Feedback should be developed further so that children know what they need to do to improve.
- There are few examples of children using digital technologies to enhance their learning. Children report that they would like opportunities to develop their digital skills and teachers should continue to work with the Associated School's Group to develop confidence and skills in provide effective and creative opportunities.

- Children's achievements in and out of school are recognised and celebrated during assemblies and displayed on the Proud Cloud wall. However, too few children can identify how these achievements help them to develop skills for learning, life and work. Teachers recognise the importance of outdoor and play based learning. As these are introduced, there is a need to focus on skills acquisition to ensure children benefit from this approach.
- Teachers plan learning for multi-stage composite classes across all areas of the curriculum. However, planned learning can be driven by coverage and often does not meet the needs of the children. Newly introduced learning pathways will support teachers in monitoring children's progress and identifying appropriate next steps in learning within literacy and numeracy. Curriculum pathways, planning for learning and approaches to assessment need to ensure children do not have gaps in their learning. Teachers regularly discuss attainment-tracking information with the headteacher. Together they identify resources and appropriate interventions. Further discussions should involve the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and record achievements. This will enable staff to evaluate how well they are meeting the needs of children who may be experiencing barriers to learning.
- Effective and consistent use of assessment is not yet integral to the planning of learning and teaching across the school. The headteacher analyses national standardised assessments and shares information with the class teachers. There is a need to develop a framework of assessment to make improved links to children's next steps in learning. The school must take prompt action to link planning to children's needs, progress and achievements. This approach will also support staff with monitoring and tracking to ensure all children make appropriate progress in their learning.
- Tracking children's progress at P1, P4 and P7 in literacy and numeracy is at early stages of implementation. Senior leaders should extend the use of the local authority tracking tool in recording, monitoring and evaluating all children's progress and achievements across all curriculum areas.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The school is developing its curriculum to ensure a whole school approach to learning for sustainability. The headteacher should take forward her plans to refresh the school's vision and aims and ensure a shared understanding of what the school wants to achieve through its curriculum and unique context.
- There are draft learning pathways for all curriculum areas. Teachers are at the early stages of using literacy and numeracy pathways to support their planning. While the school maintains a focus on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills, these now need to be further strengthened by ensuring children have opportunities to demonstrate and apply their learning across the curriculum. All staff need to explicitly link learning within and across curriculum areas.
- The headteacher should now work with staff to refresh the curriculum to reflect local and national guidance, such as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW).

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents report that they find the staff in the school, including the headteacher, very approachable and supportive. Staff use a variety of methods to communicate with parents about their child's learning and the life and work of the school. This includes the use of social media and the school app. Parents attend information evenings and engage regularly with staff about their child's progress, including discussing any barriers to learning or challenges they may face. Parental views are regularly sought on school matters through questionnaires. Parents are encouraged to participate in and support the work of the Parent Council. The school focus on parental engagement is leading to an increased emphasis on how parents can support their child's learning.
- The active Parent Council supports the school through a range of activities. This supports the school to enhance equipment, and resources. The Parent Council is becoming more actively involved in the school's improvement agenda. This will include consultation and discussion about improvements to the curriculum.
- Parents contribute to the development of skills for learning life and work through involvement in the 'world of work' week. This includes sharing career information to widen the children's understanding of the world of work.

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.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

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

- Staff know the children and their families well and most children feel confident in sharing any concerns with staff. Staff deployed in supporting roles work effectively with small groups and individuals. They work well alongside the teaching team and provide effective and timely targeted support to individuals who may require support in their learning. Senior leaders have a range of appropriate programmes and interventions in place to support the wellbeing needs of children who face challenges across the school. A few children who need further help with self-regulation require and receive ongoing targeted support and strategies. These are beginning to have a positive impact on attendance and participation in class. Staff have identified the need to develop further a nurturing approach to learning and are undertaking relevant professional learning. In taking these plans forward, it is key that the focus on nurture builds children's resilience, confidence and belief in their own abilities to achieve and attain.
- The school has recently introduced the wellbeing indicators to develop a universal understanding of wellbeing and how central it is to children's lives. Children's understanding of wellbeing is at an early stage and they are not yet able to articulate what it means to be, for example, safe or respected. Senior leaders need to consider ways in which they analyse children's perception of their progress in wellbeing on a regular basis. In a promising beginning, children have participated in a planned wellbeing web activity, which staff followed up with individual wellbeing conversations. Staff plan to repeat this process later this session. Children are not yet aware of the relevance of the school values to their own school experience. The school should consider how it strengthens its approach to supporting children to understand the impact their actions can have on others.
- Almost all children believe the school supports them to be healthy and active. They are taking part in effective physical education and a majority enjoy physical activities during the school day, at lunchtime and after school. Involvement in activities, such as the pupil council and other recently created leadership opportunities enhance children's experience of school and encourages them to develop responsibility and leadership. Children enjoy these aspects of school life, and are keen to take on further responsibilities. They value the opportunity to be effective contributors to their school. Teachers should help children to recognise the contribution all these experiences make to their overall health and wellbeing. This will also support children's understanding of the skills they are developing across all their learning, which will help them to achieve positive destinations in later life.
- The school fulfils its statutory responsibilities appropriately.
- The headteacher monitors attendance and punctuality regularly, and is proactive in dealing with any issues that may arise. Although slightly lower than the national average in 2018/19, the school's attendance rate has been in line with the national average for attendance for the previous three years. There have been no exclusions in the latest year.

- Children regularly taking school meals enjoy the food on offer and have good relationships with catering staff. Most children respond well to encouragement by staff to take their full meal entitlement. While many children do eat all the food selected, significant numbers do not, choosing instead to discard unwanted food. A clear whole school approach to food and health would support children to apply learning in real and meaningful situations and make well-informed choices.
- Most children are confident that they will be listened to and their views respected. Children learn about the importance of respecting differences through the religious education programme, as well as at assemblies. These approaches are supporting children to develop an early understanding of equity. The headteacher is prioritising a more rights-based approach to learning. We have discussed with senior leaders ways in which they could develop further approaches to equality and diversity. The headteacher, along with all staff, should continue to develop children's understanding of equality and diversity to ensure this is fully reflective of 21st century Scotland, as well as the context of the school.
- The school has a positive approach to ensuring that all children can access equally the wider life of the school. This is well supported by the Parent Council and local community.

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, levels of attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics are weak. Most children at all levels are not making sufficient progress or achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence levels. Children's attainment requires considerable improvement across the school. More work is required to ensure all staff have appropriately high expectations of children's ability to demonstrate depth and challenge and apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts.

Literacy

Listening and talking

- Attainment in listening and talking is weak. Across all stages, children are keen to contribute to class discussions, however too few have learned show respect for the views and opinions of others. Across early stages, the majority of children take turns when listening and talking in a variety of contexts and are manage to follow simple instructions. Across the middle stages, a minority of children are able to take turns when talking and contribute at appropriate times when engaging with both their teacher and peers. Across the upper stages, a minority of children are making satisfactory progress in talking, but fewer are skilled in listening. The majority of children need to develop skills of working in pairs and groups on more independent tasks.

Reading

- Overall, attainment in reading is weak. Across the school, to extend their skills, children need to read a wider variety of texts that are well matched to their skills and progress. In addition to support improvement in children's reading, all staff need to develop a shared understanding of how to develop further children's reading skills. Across early stages, the majority of children can hear and say the different single sounds made by letters and are beginning to use their knowledge of sight vocabulary to read familiar words. They do not yet apply their phonological awareness to attempt new words. Across the middle stages, a minority of children read aloud a familiar piece of text with expression and show understanding. Across the upper stages, too few children read with expected levels of fluency and expression using appropriate pace and tone. Children need to develop their higher-order reading skills. Children report that they would like opportunities to read with the teacher to further develop their reading skills.

Writing

- Overall, attainment in writing is weak. To improve children's writing, they need to have more opportunities to develop skills across a broader range of experiences and genres. Across the early stages, children are developing skills in the formation of letters. The majority of children form lower case letters legibly with increasing pencil control. Across the middle stages, the majority of children can apply spelling rules and strategies to spell words correctly. The

majority of children can use a full stop accurately. Across the upper stages, few children write enough to communicate the purpose of their text. Most children use simple sentence structures with a limited range of punctuation. Teachers must carefully plan regular opportunities for children to create short and extended texts for different purposes.

Numeracy

- Overall attainment in numeracy and mathematics is weak. Across the school, few children enjoy the challenge numeracy and mathematics provide. The majority of children opt out of perceived difficult learning opportunities, due to their lack of confidence and resilience. As a result, children do not attain the necessary level of knowledge, understanding and skills. Across the school, on occasion the pace of learning within numeracy and mathematics is too fast for the majority of children. Teachers should ensure that sufficient time is provided for the consolidation and application of learning.

Number, money and measure

- Across early stages, the majority of children can match quantities with numerical symbols and are aware of the relationships between adding and subtracting to ten. Across the middle stages, most children can count forwards and backwards in twos, fives and tens. The majority of children can add together two-digit numbers however only a few could solve subtraction problems involving two-digit whole numbers. Across upper stages, the majority of children are able to round numbers to the nearest 1000, 10,000 and 100,000. Most children are able to solve addition problems involving five digit numbers, however too few children are able to solve subtraction problems of similar value. Most children can multiply whole numbers by 100 and 1000, however, only a few are able to demonstrate an understanding of the link between fractions, decimals and percentages.

Shape, position and movement

- Across early stages, children have experience of making simple two-dimensional shapes on geo boards and using them to create pictures. Across middle stages, almost all can name and identify two-dimensional shapes. A few can name simple three-dimensional objects. A few children are able to make reasonable estimations of a given length. Across the upper stages, children do not know that the radius is half of the diameter and are unable to name three-dimensional shapes within the environment. A minority of children are able to demonstrate different types of angles.

Information handling

- Across the early stages, children have experience of creating pictographs and simple bar graphs. They have opportunities to create repeating patterns. Across lower stages, most children sort objects into sets and draw simple diagrams to sort everyday objects. Across middle stages, almost all children use tally marks to gather information and present this as bar graphs. They interpret information in bar graphs. Across upper stages, the majority of children are developing confidence when collating and organising information using a variety of bar graphs.

Attainment over time

- Overall, too few children are making appropriate progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. The headteacher has begun to gather information more effectively about how well children are attaining. As the tracking system builds, it has the potential to enable all staff to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of children and support the identification of children who require challenge and support and raise attainment across the school. Moderation activities beyond the school will support teachers to be more confident in their judgements.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's wider achievements are recognised and celebrated at whole school assemblies and in photographs on school notice boards. Children are not yet aware of the skills they are developing through wider achievement opportunities.
- Children's participation in school clubs and activities, such as basketball, and sewing are recorded. A whole school tracking system should be developed to ensure that all children have opportunities to achieve both in and out of school and that no child is at risk of missing out.
- Children speak positively about the place of music within the school. Children take pride in representing their class and school in church, at school events and at music festivals either through singing or playing a musical instrument. Most of the children involved describe feeling more confident and can explain how this confidence has helped them in subsequent situations.

Equity of all learners

- The promotion of equity is evident across aspects of the work of the school. There is a supportive and inclusive ethos. The school takes account of the socio-economic backgrounds of children and their families. Staff are developing a proactive approach in identifying barriers to learning for all children.
- The school has a positive approach to supporting children with their learning. Professional judgements have identified the need to support children's acquisition of language. The use of purchased literacy programmes supports learning through targeted interventions and universal provision. The impact of these is not yet fully evident but a few children are showing signs of being more engaged in their learning.

School Empowerment

■ Empowerment at all levels

- The headteacher has a strong focus on developing empowerment which supports two-way contributions, both to and from children, staff, parents and partners. The intention is for empowerment and collaboration for improvement to happen at all levels. The school is developing a system and creating an environment which empowers the community to work in partnership to develop learning and teaching that achieves excellence and equity for all learners. Core leaders, the headteacher, class teachers, practitioners, support staff and parents are role models for the children, inspiring and supporting them to go further. Almost all staff and an increasing number of children volunteer for and have leadership roles within the school. This supports the capacity and drive for improvement, focusing on key school priorities.

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.