

Summarised inspection findings

St Duthus School

The Highland Council

14 March 2023

Key contextual information

School name St Duthus School
Council: Highland Council
SEED number: 5120748
Roll (Dec 2022): 31

St Duthus School is an all-through specialist educational provision for children and young people with severe and complex learning needs. The current school building opened in 2015 with a capacity of 24 pupils. There are 31 children and young people on the roll at present, across the primary and secondary stages. There are five classes, each of which has a teacher and pupil support assistants. The current acting headteacher took up post in September 2022 following the retirement of the previous acting headteacher. The school is scheduled to become part of a new joint campus in late 2024 with Tain Royal Academy and two associated primary schools.

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

- Staff work well with each other to improve positive outcomes for children and young people in the school. However, senior leaders need to ensure that all staff feel equally valued and involved with the work of the school. For example, the acting headteacher is aware that it will be important to meet regularly with pupil support assistants. This would allow them to receive feedback about their work and be more involved in taking forward the school's priorities.
- Teachers are aware that the school previously had explicit vision, values and aims and that the children and young people were involved in drawing them up. However, there is general uncertainty regarding what these were. The new acting headteacher has begun to gather the views of children and young people, staff and parents on the values they feel best capture the priorities of the school. They completed a survey detailing which five values, from a list of sixty, that they would prioritise. This will inform the next stage of the planned process.
- Staff are aware of the context in which children, young people and their families are living. However, they know that more needs to be done to engage the community in the work of the school. Whilst parents are happy that their children enjoy and are safe in the school, the school needs to identify, and work much more closely with, local agencies and providers.
- Staff recognise that the school is at the beginning of its improvement journey and are committed to implementing change. They do not yet feel involved in having the responsibility for leading on priorities to improve the school. However, they have been sharing aspects of new approaches during the time set aside for professional dialogue each week, including an autism-specific initiative and a new reading scheme. The acting headteacher is aware that leadership opportunities need to be developed at all levels across the school and that staff have the capacity to take this forward. He is also committed to promoting and supporting innovation, creativity and practitioner research.
- Staff acknowledge, and appreciate, that time is protected by the acting headteacher for collaborative staff learning and self-evaluation. Teachers have also recently had the opportunity to engage in self-evaluative activities, including agreeing the priorities for the current school improvement plan.
- Staff share their learning during professional dialogue sessions and are kept up to date with child protection approaches at the beginning of each session. They are keen to focus more closely on their individual professional development needs during their annual review and to access appropriate courses.
- Staff have contributed to planning for the new shared campus which is scheduled to be completed by late 2024. This has involved consideration of working spaces, toileting facilities and the general layout. It will be important for the authority to continue to involve teachers and

support staff in the specification of the St Duthus area of the proposed campus. This should ensure that it will be appropriately configured and provisioned to meet the needs of the children and young people who will be attending.

- Overall, the acting headteacher has successfully identified the main areas for improvement across the school. He realises that it will be important to work closely with staff, parents, children and young people and other stakeholders to agree the best way to take each of these areas forward.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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 ethos throughout the school is built on the positive relationships between children and young people and adults. Staff show consideration and respect to all children and young people. Children and young people interact well with each other. This supports them to learn in a school where they enjoy their activities. The positive learning environment helps children and young people to engage meaningfully in their education. In most lessons, children and young people are offered opportunities to exercise choice in their learning activities. Where appropriate, a few children and young people undertake tasks independently and with minimum levels of support. This is helping them to develop their independence and sense of achievement.
- Teachers are developing their skills in using a new approach to capturing children or young people's attention when introducing new learning. When used well, this approach is successful in promoting children and young people's interest in their learning. Teachers use a range of resources to ensure children and young people's learning experiences are motivating and varied. Where appropriate, teachers explain the purpose of tasks effectively to support children and young people to understand what they are being asked to do. Staff use the local community to support children and young people to learn in real life contexts. For example, visits to local shops help children and young people to understand the concepts of exchange and money.
- Teachers should consider how digital technologies could be used more effectively to enrich children's and young people's learning. This should include how alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) tools could be used more effectively to help children and young people to share their learning with their parents. Staff should develop further their use of digital tools to support children and young people to foster their independence.
- All staff know each child's or young person's individual needs well. They use this knowledge to communicate effectively with each child or young person in ways they will understand best. Teachers now need to use this knowledge to plan learning which offers children and young people appropriate levels of challenge. Pupil support assistants help children and young people to make progress in their learning. Teachers need to differentiate learning more effectively to ensure that children and young people are challenged appropriately. Support assistants should be deployed to help children and young people to make the best possible progress.
- Teachers use individual communication passports to capture details about children and young people. These include barriers to their learning, likes and dislikes and preferred strategies to support learning. Teachers need to develop more effective use of assessments to support their understanding of the skills, attributes and capabilities of each child and young person. Teachers also need to employ a wider range of assessments to ensure they have high quality evidence to inform next steps in children and young people's learning. Assessment does not

inform planned learning sufficiently well. The use of assessment needs to be developed further across the school to support teachers to develop a shared understanding of expectations.

- Teachers plan learning across short and medium term timescales. They use the experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence to plan learning. However, planned learning focuses too heavily on aspects of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Learning activities do not build upon children or young people's prior learning sufficiently well. Teachers should consider how children and young people can benefit from a range of experiences across other areas of the curriculum.
- Teachers use a broad general education (BGE) tracker which features individual learning targets (ILTs) for each child or young person. However, the BGE tracker does not support teachers to track and monitor children or young people's progress effectively. The tracker contains too many ILTs for each child or young person. This limits teachers' abilities to meaningfully review children's and young people's progress. Teachers track and monitor young people's progress in the senior phase through their attainment in their National Qualifications. Teachers need to develop a simplified process for tracking and monitoring children and young people's progress. This needs to include robust evidence which will support teachers to know when a child or young person has been successful. They need to develop tracking and monitoring further to support planning for next steps in children's and young people's learning. This should include ensuring young people in the senior phase make progress from their prior learning and attain as best they can.
- Teachers reflect on their practice when reviewing their medium-term plans for their class. This can lead to new or revised targets for children and young people. Ideally, all staff members in the class will be involved in this review. However, teachers report that it can be difficult to find time for team meetings involving all staff. This means that some points of view may not be included during the review. There is also capacity to improve the moderation of these plans with other classes. Teachers would be keen to adopt this approach.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Themes for learning in the BGE are planned across a three-year timescale. This supports teachers to plan learning within a range of real-life contexts. The senior phase is planned around delivery of National Qualifications. The curriculum is designed to offer children and young people opportunities for personal achievement and to contribute to the ethos and life of the school. The four contexts for learning feature within curricular planning. Pathways focus significantly on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Progression within other curricular areas is planned within interdisciplinary learning. Children and young people's progress in learning is guided by learning tracks, milestones and benchmarks. Children and young people are developing their digital skills through a range of activities such as programming simple robots. Staff need to review the school's curriculum to ensure there is a clear rationale, which takes better account of all the factors that make the school unique. Planning lacks clarity and consistency as to how the curriculum contributes to children and young people making progress in their learning. Teachers need to ensure learning pathways support children and young people more effectively to build on their prior learning. Learning pathways require to be planned to raise attainment for all children and young people.
- A limited number of partners support the school to develop children's and young people's skills for life and work. They support them to develop their understanding of hospitality, budgeting and enterprise. Links with local schools ensure that children and young people access opportunities for physical education such as swimming and ball skills. A few children in the senior phase attend a skills development course at Inverness College. The school should now seek to develop further the range, and role, of partners in supporting the work of the school. The school should ensure that partners are engaged meaningfully in the development and evaluation of learning pathways.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents are positive about the welcome that they and their children receive in the school. They are confident that their child is safe and well cared for. They believe that staff know their child's needs well. Staff provide parents with regular updates on how their child's day has been. Parents value these updates as they provide additional reassurance that their child is responding well to support in school.
- Parents are not yet included fully in planning, decision making or coordination relating to what their child is learning or the support their child receives. The acting headteacher, together with staff, should increase parental engagement so that they become more involved in decisions made about their child.
- Parents would appreciate more information from the school about initiatives their child may benefit from. This includes opportunities provided by the local authority or third sector organisations that may increase children's and young people's participation in a range of activities.

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 have identified that they are improving a number of outcomes for children and young people and they can demonstrate what learners are able to achieve. The school can demonstrate it is improving wellbeing outcomes for the majority of individual children. It now needs to develop approaches to gather this information in order to identify better how they can improve wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people.
- Lead professionals prepare and review each child's plan, along with parents, twice a year. It is now important to ensure that all school staff are involved and asked for their views. Some parents are unclear if they have been involved in many of these meetings. Teachers are not individualising their medium-term plans enough to reference and take account of the individual wellbeing targets of children and young people.
- The whole learning community does not yet have a shared understanding of wellbeing and children's rights. The staff has identified this as a priority which is being taken forward in the school improvement plan.
- Most children and young people in the school have indicated that they feel safe there and parents who spoke to inspectors agree with this. Parents feel that their children are happy in the school.
- All staff and partners feel valued and supported. However, there is capacity to involve parents and partners much more in the running of the school, building on the very positive relationships which exist between them and staff.
- Staff know and understand the care needs of children and young people well. They have positive relationships with those in their class. However, despite the high overall staffing complement in each class, support staff are often not involved in discussions about the learning which is planned. Support staff are aware that they occasionally intervene to support children and young people rather than allow them to undertake a task independently. This can be due to time constraints. This issue could be resolved through whole class team discussions about the planned learning in order to develop a shared understanding and agree roles and strategies.
- Staff are adept at using the wider grounds of the school and the local community for learning activities, ensuring that learning takes place in real life situations outside the classroom. The compact nature of the school building has resulted in the staffroom being placed, at present, within the kitchen and dining area. This has resulted in each class having snacks, break times and lunches within the classrooms as the dining area is unavailable. This has raised issues of hygiene and dignity for children and young people. The acting headteacher and staff now need

to agree how best to reconfigure the use of the school building so that the Food and Hygiene Regulations are appropriately met.

- The school, in conjunction with the local authority, should ensure that every child or young person who is care experienced has been assessed regarding whether or not they are entitled to a coordinated support plan (CSP).
- The school is working to ensure that children and young people are treated equally and are included appropriately in the life of the school. However, more could be done to celebrate diversity across the curriculum more overtly. Children could be better involved in diversity issues in classes at the level of their own understanding. They are being encouraged, through new approaches to learning, to be more understanding of their classmates. Staff should develop this further as a way to explore difference and diversity.

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, attainment in literacy and numeracy is weak. Senior leaders acknowledge that children and young people could be making better progress. There is a need to increase the pace of learning across the school. Staff have a focus on literacy and numeracy skills across the school, although this can sometimes be to the detriment of other curricular areas. They now need to provide reliable data and information on how much progress children and young people make in literacy and numeracy.

Literacy and English

Listening and talking

- Almost all children and young people use a range of communication systems to communicate well with staff. These include signing, symbols, eye control assistive technologies, and braille. This is providing children and young people with opportunities to engage better with activities, take turns and listen to instructions. Staff understand, and are responsive to, the communication needs of the children and young people. However, staff should now consider further the use of communication systems to support children and young people develop greater independence.
- Young people experience opportunities to develop their talking skills through regular community activities. They are demonstrating improved awareness of using greetings, asking for directions, or asking for support to find items in shops. These young people are building important listening and talking skills that help them prepare for their adult life.

Reading

- A few classes visit the local library to promote the enjoyment of reading and texts. This should be developed further. Children and young people can access class library areas in classrooms that have age-appropriate books to motivate an interest. Children and young people enjoy listening to and responding to stories. A minority of children can read short sentences or identify words within texts. Staff support some children to use digital technologies to engage with simple texts.

Writing

- Children and young people at pre-early level and early level are beginning to develop fine motor skills through mark making activities. A minority of children and young people develop early level writing skills and make progress with writing words in sentences. Young people at first level are learning how to write short sentences or answers to questions with growing independence. A minority of these young people use their skills to write short letters for a purpose. A few children and young people can make effective use of digital tools to support them create text.

Numeracy and mathematics

Number, money and measure

- Across the school, a majority of children and young people at pre-early level and early level are reinforcing their understanding of counting using a variety of approaches. For example, they are demonstrating growing awareness of counting through singing, science activities, going to the shops and playing games. Children at pre-early level recognise familiar numbers and can sequence numbers from one to five. They can identify the number of items on display and add one more item to create the next number. Children and young people at early level are able to recall independently the number sequence forwards from one to five.
- Young people working at first level are learning how to use calculators to support them with addition and subtraction. They are beginning to tell the time using half past and quarter past using digital and analogue clocks. A few young people use strategies to sequence larger whole numbers and can solve written addition and subtraction sums for three-digit numbers. Almost all young people require significant support to solve addition and subtraction problems written in word form. A few young people are beginning to use strategies and counting resources to learn multiplication facts.

Shape, position and movement

- At pre-early level, children and young people are investigating objects and supported to match shapes using puzzles pieces. They are developing awareness of positional language, for example, 'beside', 'in' and 'on'. At early level, children and young people are exploring shape through play-based activities. This includes matching or sorting shapes using size, colour or feel.

Information handling

- Children and young people are using knowledge to match and sort familiar objects. There is little evidence that children and young people are expanding their experiences of information handling. Across all CfE levels, children and young people are unfamiliar with presenting information using graphs or charts.

Attainment over time

- School data does not provide robust or reliable information to track attainment of literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics over time. The acting headteacher has correctly identified that tracking of attainment over time is a school priority, with current systems not providing useful information or data. The acting headteacher should now work with staff to develop the new tracking system. This will support all staff better to track attainment and use data to chart progress over time.
- In session 2021-2022, most young people in their senior phase received accreditation for a small number of National Qualifications units at level 1 and level 2. No young people achieved National Qualifications course awards. For session 2022-2023, the school predicts a minority of young people will complete a growing range of National Qualifications course awards at level 2. If successful, this will represent a significant increase in accreditation for young people. The school predicts a majority of young people will complete a growing number of National Qualifications units at level 1 and level 2 across a broader range of subjects. Staff now need to develop this initial improvement to provide young people with a wider range of opportunities for accreditation across a wider range of subjects.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- In most classes, children's and young people's achievements in school are recognised and celebrated within the school. Staff use home school diaries and photographic displays regularly

to share achievements with parents. Staff should now track and record children's and young people's participation in activities and skills they develop. This will support staff to better identify potential barriers to participation in activities and take steps to support children and young people more effectively.

- Staff support children's and young people's engagement with the local community well. As a result, the local community appreciate children's and young people's contribution to the area where the school is located. This is improving community awareness of how children and young people can have a positive impact and support community initiatives. Children and young people help keep the local area tidy and work well with community programmes to make the local area more attractive. Recently, children and young people raised funds through opening a 'pop up shop'.
- Differentiation by adult support is one way in which the school is striving to improve attainment and achievement of children and young people. The move to National Qualifications modules in the senior phase is also seen as a positive move to increase and improve appropriate attainment opportunities for young people. Similarly, attendance at college link courses in Inverness is equipping young people with confidence and independence, along with the development of life skills. For many of those who attend, the process and experience is seen as being as important as the subject matter which is covered. However, the skills which young people are developing could be better acknowledged and captured as achievements by the school.

Equity for all learners

- Across the school, children and young people are benefiting from the use of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Staff use most of the PEF allocation for professional learning aimed at developing a consistent approach to increase children's attention and motivation for learning. The school uses the remainder of the PEF allocation to resource a new reading scheme. Senior leaders have clearly identified children and young people who require a targeted approach. This accounts for most children and young people across the school. As the school has low numbers of children and young people on the school roll, they deliver interventions as part of whole class activity. Staff now need to demonstrate how they are measuring the impact of PEF interventions. This will support staff identify what impact PEF interventions are having in reducing the attainment gap.

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.