

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's Primary School

South Lanarkshire Council

12 September 2023

Key contextual information

St. Mary's Primary School is a denominational school in the small town of Larkhall in South Lanarkshire. The school has a close and positive working relationship with the local Roman Catholic church of the same name, which is in the neighbouring property. In recent years, there has been significant turnover in the headteacher role. The current headteacher has been in place in an acting capacity since January 2023 and was appointed to the substantive position in May 2023. The roll has risen from 73 in 2021 to 83 currently, organised across four classes. 13% of children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 and 2 and 12% of children are entitled to free school meals. 30% of children have a home language that is not English. Attendance in 2021-22 was in line with the national average. In 2020/21, there were 14.7 cases of exclusion per 1,000 pupils, compared with the national average for primary schools of 3.6 per 1,000 pupils. The headteacher has addressed this through a change of approach which has resulted in no exclusions since she took up the temporary post in January 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

- Children at St Mary's Primary School experience a very nurturing and inclusive ethos, as evidenced by positive relationships across the school. All staff have children's rights at the heart of their work, underpinned by the school vision as 'A Place to Grow'. Staff understand the needs of children and families very well. They value all children and demonstrate respect when addressing these needs. Across the school, children benefit from a very calm, purposeful learning environment that promotes an eagerness to learn. Children are very friendly, kind and courteous to visitors and one another. They enjoy being at their school and feel valued by all members of staff.
- Most children engage well in their learning in most lessons. They are eager and enthusiastic learners who work well together in pairs and small groups. Most children work confidently during set tasks and activities. In most classes, children demonstrate their understanding of what they are learning and know how to succeed. As planned, teachers should develop further opportunities for learners to lead and take increasing responsibility for their own learning.
- As members of House Leadership Groups, all children have the opportunity to contribute effectively to the wider life of the school and beyond. This allows them to develop an understanding of relevant and current issues, focusing particularly on sustainability, global citizenship, children's rights and health and wellbeing. In addition, children in P4-7 lead lunchtime clubs such as dance, multi sports and book club. Through their involvement in the house groups and clubs, children develop their leadership skills well and extend their understanding of social issues.

- Across the school, the quality of teaching is good. Children enjoy interesting learning activities in most classes that are well planned by teachers. Teachers should continue to develop a shared understanding of what highly effective learning and teaching looks like, in line with the recently introduced learning, teaching and assessment policy. They are well placed to build on their strong collaborative professional learning to ensure that all children across the school experience high-quality learning and teaching consistently.
- Teachers at the P1/2 stage have embedded a very positive approach to play pedagogy, and this is beginning to be developed at other stages. Teachers demonstrate a good understanding of learning through play and the role of the adult in the learning environment. They plan well for play opportunities and direct teaching of groups. Teachers are responsive to young learners and fully involve them in the planning for learning. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the early years' national guidance, 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' which underpins this work. The school should regularly evaluate their approach to play pedagogy as they develop this across the school.
- Teachers use digital technologies creatively across the curriculum to deepen and enrich children's learning in most classes. For example, children in the upper stages use a digital whiteboard to share ideas in planning writing. In the middle stages, children use programmable devices as aids to promote health and wellbeing. As teachers have identified, they should continue to develop clear technology progression pathways to support planning for progression in learning. Teachers should also consider how to ensure that all learners have opportunities to choose how they use technology to present and demonstrate their learning.
- Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment strategies at identified times in the year to check children's progress in line with the recently established school assessment framework. This includes using standardised assessments to support teachers' professional judgements. Teachers now need to use assessment information more effectively as an integral part of planning for learning, informing appropriate next steps for all learners. Teachers have identified the need for greater consistency in approaches to assessment to ensure that evidence is valid and reliable.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers take account of the wide range of needs within the composite class structure across the school through differentiation. Teachers should now develop a shared understanding of a greater variety of strategies for differentiation to ensure that all learners are supported and challenged appropriately. This will help them to develop a consistent, integral and well-planned approach to meeting the needs of all children.
- In most classes, teachers give constructive and helpful written feedback to children to help improve their learning. They give children opportunities at set times of the year to evaluate their progress and set personal targets for their learning in Learning Journey Passports. Teachers, along with children, should review learning targets more regularly to ensure these are effective in improving learning. Teachers should develop a more consistent use of feedback, which is linked to learning intentions and success criteria. This will support learners to know more clearly how they have been successful and how to improve their work. This will also support learners to become more confident in talking about their learning.
- All teachers plan learning and teaching across curricular areas using progression overviews. They now need to ensure that planning processes are manageable and take better account of reliable assessment information. Teachers at the early stages have a responsive approach to planning. This provides a wide range of opportunities for children to lead their own learning. All teachers should now consider how to build on this example of effective practice. Children across the school would benefit from leading their own learning on a more regular basis.

- Teachers track and monitor the progress of learners in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing effectively. They engage in regular tracking discussions with the headteacher at set times throughout the year. They make good use of the newly introduced Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) profile to track the most vulnerable learners and identify appropriate strategies to support their learning.
- Teachers have engaged in helpful moderation activities in collaboration with colleagues from other local schools. This has supported teachers to develop confidence in their judgement through professional dialogue about learning, teaching and assessment. Further planned opportunities for teachers to engage with the National Benchmarks will support them to develop a shared understanding of achievement of a level. In turn, this will support them to identify more clearly the valid and reliable evidence required to inform their professional judgement.

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- St. Mary's is a small school with regular variations in cohort numbers across years. Care needs to be taken when comparing percentage figures over time. Analysis of data for this report has therefore taken account of learner numbers as well as percentage figures.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy across the school is good. Most children across the school achieve expected Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) levels in literacy and numeracy. Attainment is stronger in numeracy at P1 and P4 with almost all children achieving expected CFE levels.
- Almost all children who experience barriers to their learning or have additional support needs are making good progress in their learning. Groups and individual children are closely monitored by staff and their learning carefully tracked to ensure that a good pace of progress is maintained. A minority of younger children experienced disruption to learning as a result of COVID-19 which has impacted particularly on their development of skills in listening and talking.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children are making good progress in reading, writing and listening and talking.

Listening and talking

- Most children listen well and engage in conversation with adults and peers during learning and social activities. At early level, almost all children listen well and respond appropriately to their teacher and peers. At first level, most children listen and respond appropriately to others in class and group discussions. They are able to express their views clearly and can build upon the contributions of others. At second level children need to develop their confidence and vocabulary in expressing their own thoughts and ideas when talking about their learning.

Reading

- There is a very well-established culture across the school of valuing reading for enjoyment. Children value the access they have to high-quality texts and engage well in the school book club. They enjoy reading for different purposes. Children at the middle and upper stages describe their favourite authors and explain readily the reasons for their preferred genre. The school has achieved Silver Reading School Accreditation and is now working towards achieving Gold.

Writing

- The majority of children at early level write simple sentences using basic punctuation correctly. Most children at first level create a range of texts to suit the purpose of the task and audience.

Children are beginning to use ambitious vocabulary in extended pieces of writing. Most children at second level use a range of punctuation accurately and most of their sentences are grammatically correct. They make appropriate choices about how to lay out their writing clearly. At second level, children would benefit from more regular opportunities to write at length for a range of purposes and contexts. Children at first and second levels have the opportunity to self and peer assess their writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are making very good progress.
- As children move through the school, almost all develop effective skills in using mathematical vocabulary and notation and mental agility. Most children can talk confidently about how they approach calculations, justify their choice of strategy and discuss alternatives. Most children have a good understanding of where they use mathematical skills in everyday life.

Number, money and measure

- Almost all children at early level are confident in counting on and back to 10, and in twos, fives and tens. They compare lengths using everyday language correctly. All children enjoy numeracy activities outdoors, and most can estimate lengths confidently using standard and non-standard units, such as measuring their height using blocks, straws, shoe-lengths and rulers. At first level, most children are confident in basic number operations with two-digit numbers, place value and multiples of 100. They calculate time intervals confidently. They demonstrate quick and accurate mental agility, for example in calculating change from £10. Most children at second level are confident in all aspects of number, money and measure. They can calculate a percentage discount and can discuss the use of credit cards. A few demonstrate good mental agility with speed and accuracy. They are less sure when talking about volume and weight, although further learning is planned in these areas.

Shape, position and movement

- Most children at early level are beginning to recognise symmetry in pictures and simple patterns. At first level, most children speak confidently about the properties of a range of two-dimensional objects. They recognise and discuss defining features well. Most children have a good understanding of lines of symmetry and can calculate supplementary angles. A few are less confident when discussing the concept of area and using the correct terms to accurately describe the properties of three-dimensional objects. Most children at second level demonstrate confidence in describing the properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They use mathematical language correctly to describe different angles.

Information handling

- At the early level, most children use tally marks accurately to count and then present information in a simple picture graph. Children at first level find it challenging to discuss information handling. Most children have had limited opportunity to use charts, diagrams, graphs and tables to display and extract information. At second level, most children are confident in discussing different ways of presenting and extracting information from bar charts, graphs, pie-charts and timetables. However, they are less confident in recalling how they use such methods in their learning across the curriculum.

Attainment over time

- The school has data to evidence attainment over time, which shows overall that high levels of attainment in numeracy and literacy have been maintained across the last five years. The headteacher's analysis of this data shown a slight decrease in literacy and numeracy

measures in 2022-23. This is due in part to the introduction of a more robust approach to assessment and the identification of reliable evidence of children's progress in learning. The school is now well placed to build on this robust approach to ensure that all children attain to their full potential.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children's achievements are celebrated well and highly visible throughout the school in attractive displays, of which children are very proud. Children are invited to share and celebrate their achievements at every assembly and parents are updated on achievements through the use of newsletters, the school digital app and social media. As a result, children have a strong sense of pride in their achievements and in their school. Most children feel that they have the opportunity to discuss their achievements out of school with a staff member who knows them well.
- Across the school, children enjoy a wide range of opportunities for wider achievement. All children have the opportunity to attend a club, including Mini Vinnies, sports and games. Many of these clubs are run by older children. The refreshed House System has given greater ownership to older children, who are developing leadership skills and work collaboratively on projects, such as lunchtime reading clubs. All children participate in House Committees. Older children are developing their confidence and leadership skills as a result, while younger children develop their skills in reading, sports and other activities.
- Teachers track children's participation in clubs and wider achievement termly and analyse the information to plan activities that meet the needs and aspirations of specific children. They identify and address any gaps in provision through regular professional dialogue with each other and partners, for example, Active Schools and The Machan Trust.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and teachers analyse attainment data and design appropriate strategies to ensure any gaps in attainment are addressed. They evaluate these strategies carefully to evaluate their success. A clear position statement sets out the measures taken in relationships, learning, trips, travel, achievements and clothing to ensure that all children feel included and do not miss out on any learning opportunities. The headteacher makes effective use of a participatory budgeting approach to consult with stakeholders. This is supporting well-targeted use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to address identified barriers to learning. As a result, the attainment gap in numeracy has narrowed in the course of this session. Teachers are well placed to build on this success to accelerate further the progress of targeted learners in literacy and numeracy.

Other relevant evidence

- All stakeholder groups comment very positively on the impact the headteacher is having. There is general agreement that she is approachable and solution-focused, as well as being passionate and clear about how the school can improve. She has quickly established a significant level of trust and confidence in the school community. This is motivating parents to be more engaged with the school and also inspiring and supporting staff to be part of a team who are working to achieve a shared goal. The headteacher employs a very well-judged pace of change, which teachers welcome and respond to very positively, through strong, collaborative professional learning and practice.

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.