

# Summarised inspection findings

**Echt School**

Aberdeenshire Council

19 March 2024

## Key contextual information

Echt School and Nursery class is a small rural school situated in the village of Echt in Aberdeenshire Council. There are 52 children working across three multi-stage composite classes. In session 2022-2023, the school roll rose by twenty percent. Echt Nursery is accommodated within the main school building. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the nursery with an early years senior practitioner assuming leadership for the provision.

The headteacher has been in post for six years. There is a total teaching complement, including the headteacher of 3.2 fulltime equivalent (FTE) teaching staff. There is also the equivalent of 1.5 FTE pupil support assistants.

All children who attend the school live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones 8 and 9. In September 2022, a few children were recorded as having English as an Additional language. Thirty-seven percent of children require additional support with their learning. The school receives a small amount of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF).

Last session, the school had no exclusions. Attendance is in line with the national average.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- All staff and children use the well-embedded school values to underpin successfully the life and work of the school. Children reflect meaningfully on the school values in class and during assemblies. Children enjoy their roles as 'Value Warriors' which help them to live the school values. The headteacher and staff reflect regularly on the school vision and values as part of their approaches to planning for continuous school improvement.
- All staff and almost all children have a very firm understanding of children's rights. Children have created an attractive school display linking the school values to children's rights. Older children also link their classroom jobs to the school values and children's rights. This supports children well to have shared ownership of the school values, understand their rights and to be involved in leading change.
- All staff have a clear understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school within a rural community. All children have worthwhile opportunities to contribute to and influence school improvement through their weekly participation in pupil voice groups. Children work together diligently and enjoy seeing the impact of their suggestions and work on the school 'you said we did' display. Older children also have regular opportunities to lead on the wider life of the school for example, as house captains, peer mentors, P1 buddies and through leading lunchtime clubs. This is developing their leadership skills well.

- Staff lead pupil voice groups successfully and also lead on certain aspects of school improvement, for example modern languages. Building on this, the headteacher should now consider providing staff with further leadership opportunities linked to school improvement planning. This will support all staff to have greater ownership of planned changes and build leadership at all levels.
- The headteacher consults regularly with the Parent Council and the wider parent body to gather their views. Most parents agree that the school takes account of their views when making changes. For example, in response to a parent survey, the headteacher delivered a workshop to families on how school staff assess children's progress. The headteacher consults with parents on school improvement priorities and the use of PEF.
- The staff team work collaboratively with the headteacher and they support each other well. This is an important strength and increases the school's capacity for change and continuous improvement. The headteacher gathers the views of staff to inform school improvement through regular meetings and consultations. Teachers also have a few opportunities to use 'How Good is Our School (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)' to review aspects of the school's work. For example, teachers identified strengths and areas for development on learning and teaching which is helping to build consistency in this area. The headteacher should develop a calendar of self-evaluation activities to review aspects of the school's work systematically throughout the school year. This should support all staff to have a clearer strategic overview of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The headteacher has a strong understanding of data and uses this well to inform school improvement priorities. She sets priorities annually and then agrees these with staff and all stakeholders. The headteacher manages the pace of change well by ensuring that there is time for staff to embed and review school improvement priorities from previous sessions. The headteacher ensures that school improvement priorities focus sharply on closing the poverty related attainment gap and raising attainment for all. There is a clear plan in place to use PEF. As a next step, the headteacher should support staff to have a greater role in implementing PEF priorities. This should ensure that planned improvements using PEF are fully sustainable.
- The headteacher protects time for staff professional learning in the annual collegiate calendar. She provides staff with relevant professional learning opportunities linked to school improvement priorities. The headteacher promotes opportunities for staff to gain professional accreditation in areas of interest. For example, staff achieved professional recognition from the General Teaching Council for Scotland for their work in developing children's thinking skills. This work is supporting children's thinking and reasoning skills very well.
- Teachers seek and value children's views to improve their approaches to learning and teaching. Children evaluate the quality of the learning experiences they receive using 'How Good is OUR School?' They provide candid feedback to their teachers about what went well and what they would like to see improved. Teachers act upon this feedback and children describe how this is improving the quality of the experiences they have.
- The headteacher has created a quality assurance calendar to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching in a range of ways. For example, the headteacher observes lessons and gives detailed and useful feedback to staff on how to improve their practice. Staff also participate in peer observations to support each other and develop their skills. As a result, teachers are developing their understanding of high-quality learning and teaching. The headteacher and all staff are well-placed to develop a more strategic approach to improving the quality of learning and teaching by concentrating on agreed aspects.

## 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

- There are very positive relationships, underpinned firmly by children's rights, between adults and children during all learning experiences. Children are polite and respectful to each other and to adults. Children and staff in each class have worked together successfully to develop class charters based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children discuss confidently what they enjoy about their school and live the school values. All children are members of a 'pupil voice group'. Children undertake a range of responsibilities successfully, developing confidence and communication skills by working alongside children from other stages.
- Teachers participated in useful training in outdoor learning. As a result, all children have highly engaging opportunities for outdoor learning supported by local partners. Teachers use outdoor learning experiences effectively as a stimulus for developing children's writing. This helps children to develop a range of skills, such as problem solving, creativity, independence and risk assessment. Teachers should continue to develop their approaches to outdoor learning to embed this more fully across the curriculum.
- All teachers use digital technology, such as interactive screens, effectively to support class lessons. Children in the upper school use digital devices regularly to support and extend their learning. Staff use well-presented displays to celebrate and support children's learning. Children are proud of their work on display.
- Teachers are at the early stages of developing play pedagogy through engagement with national practice guidance. They should continue with planned professional learning in this area to develop their understanding of the relevance of play and to plan quality interactions, spaces and experiences. This should also help teachers to find a balance between direct teaching and child-initiated play.
- Across the school, most children engage well in their learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning clearly with children. This supports children well to understand what they are learning and make links to prior knowledge. In the majority of lessons, learning is differentiated to meet the needs of all children, including those who require additional support. Children would benefit from more opportunities to shape and agree measures of success for their learning. This should help children to be clearer about the progress they are making.
- The headteacher and staff have developed a helpful position statement that lays out clearly expectations regarding approaches to high-quality learning and teaching. As identified by the headteacher, there is a need for staff to work together to achieve greater consistency in providing effective questioning and feedback. Teachers have implemented a marking code to

support children in developing their writing skills. This is helping to provide consistency across the school in the feedback children receive. Teachers should ensure they apply the principles of this marking code consistently.

- Most children are enthusiastic learners, completing tasks diligently as individuals and in pairs. Children would benefit from more opportunities for choice about learning tasks and follow up activities. Lessons are often overly teacher directed using worksheets. The headteacher, working alongside staff, should continue to develop processes to improve the pace of lessons and develop creative learning tasks to challenge children. This will support increased opportunities for children to lead their learning.
- Teachers plan children's learning using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). They use well-designed progression pathways for literacy, numeracy and a useful three-year rolling programme to link different areas of the curriculum. Teachers consider the skills children will develop as they plan learning. This provides children with breadth and progression in their learning.
- A few staff have completed certificated training on approaches to developing children's thinking skills. They use relevant educational research and findings well to support them with this approach. Most staff implement these strategies successfully as part of the whole school vision. This work is supporting children's reasoning skills successfully. Children can justify their explanations and offer solutions in a mature way during discussions about their learning.
- The headteacher and staff have developed a helpful assessment overview to coordinate the timing of assessments across the school. They use a range of useful standardised and formative assessment approaches. Teachers plan assessments in literacy and numeracy as an integral part of planning children's learning. They have also recently developed well-considered holistic assessments. These provide children with opportunities to apply their skills across a range of curricular areas. Teachers should continue to develop their understanding of how to make best use of assessment information to directly influence teaching and learning.
- Teachers engage in useful moderation activities to support their professional judgements on children's progress. They have worked successfully with their cluster colleagues to create a shared understanding of progression within a level, with a particular focus on writing. This is supporting well their understanding of children's progress and attainment. Senior leaders should continue to work with teachers to use assessment information alongside national Benchmarks to support them in identifying children's next steps in learning. Teachers would benefit from making greater use of the moderation cycle when developing their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This will help ensure that all children experience appropriate challenge in their learning.
- The headteacher has developed a whole school tracking system to monitor effectively children's progress and attainment in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff use tracking data well to support their termly discussions about the progress of all children. During these discussions, staff identify children who require support or challenge in their learning and review the impact of interventions on children's attainment.
- Support for learning staff work well with teachers to plan relevant and helpful interventions for children who require additional support or who face barriers in their learning. They use assessment information carefully to measure the progress children make. Pupil support staff

work well to consolidate and support children's learning and are valued members of the school team.

- The headteacher uses PEF to provide additional teaching staff who deliver targeted support for children with identified gaps in their literacy or numeracy. The headteacher and teachers can evidence children's accelerated progress and the closing of the attainment gap for children receiving targeted support.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use local authority planning pathways linked to the experiences and outcomes of CfE and national Benchmarks to plan children's learning in literacy and numeracy. These pathways ensure children's learning builds upon what they already know. Children have opportunities to choose the contexts for learning that links different areas of the curriculum. Teachers should now ensure there are progression pathways across all areas of the curriculum, including digital technology so that children continually build on their knowledge and skills.
- Staff bundle experiences and outcomes on a three-year cycle for learning contexts to cover other areas of the curriculum. This supports staff to ensure children receive breadth and progression across the curriculum. For example, children are developing their curiosity and scientific skills through a space context.
- All children learn French progressively from P1 to P7. Children in the upper stages experience aspects of Mandarin. Children receive two hours of high-quality learning in physical education (PE). Teachers use a whole school overview to ensure a breadth of learning experiences. As identified by the headteacher, teachers should use an agreed format to ensure children build progressively on their PE skills. Children receive a progressive programme of learning in Religious and Moral Education.
- Partners deliver engaging outdoor learning experiences in the Forest Schools programme. Older children participate in an exciting outdoor education residential visit. This provides them with enjoyable opportunities to enjoy and learn about a range of sports and be self-sufficient. Staff would benefit from developing an outdoor learning progression pathway. This will provide children with increased opportunities to learn outdoors and support consistently high-quality experiences.
- Teachers work collegiately and actively seek opportunities to engage in professional learning to develop the school's curriculum. Senior leaders and teachers received useful training in approaches to the teaching of writing. As planned, they should continue to develop the writing curriculum to raise attainment further.
- Staff plan primary to secondary transitions well. This supports continuity of learning for children moving into S1. Staff should continue to support transitions at key points including nursery to primary and for transition between classes.
- Children enjoy participating in engineering challenges with schools across the local cluster. Parents support children to design and build cars as part of a competition. These opportunities develop children's teamworking, science and problem-solving skills well.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Almost all parents recognise the positive school relationships which help their child to feel respected and confident. They describe the ‘family feel’ and strong sense of community within the school.
- The headteacher has implemented a helpful ‘reporting to parents’ calendar outlining events throughout the school year where parents can find out more about their child’s learning. Parents enjoy attending these events and feel they support them well to know how to help their child at home. A few parents would like more timely communication about these events and activities.
- Parents access children’s learning through an online platform and children use digital applications and tools to facilitate home learning. This provides parents with useful opportunities to engage in their child’s educational journey.
- Most parents feel encouraged to be involved in the work of the Parent Council. Parents talk enthusiastically about the work of the Parent Council in supporting children’s learning by providing resources through fundraising activities. The Parent Council were instrumental in recent improvements to the playground.
- Parents organise a running club to contribute effectively to children’s physical wellbeing. Parents are now members of the school’s rights group. Children and parents have ambitious plans to undertake a community campaign on children’s rights.



## 2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

### 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- All staff promote and develop positive relationships with children and their families. Staff model positive relationships with each other to provide an inclusive and nurturing environment for children to learn and develop. Children interact respectfully with adults in the school, visitors and each other.
- Children have a very strong understanding of their rights as defined by the UNCRC. This is a major strength of the school. The school has achieved a national award for their work in this area. 'Dignity stations' placed throughout the school support children well to understand and value the dignity of themselves and others. Impressively, older children talk about the difference between dignity and respect, demonstrating a deep understanding of these concepts. Children recognise clearly how their rights impact on their learning and give them a voice to influence developments within the school. For example, children led a rights-based community café for parents. The headteacher also delivered a useful information session to parents on rights. Families describe how this is helping them to understand children's rights. This is building children's confidence and improving their outcomes.
- Children have a firm understanding of their own wellbeing and discuss the wellbeing indicators regularly during assemblies. Most children know that they can talk to someone if they feel worried or upset and they feel safe in school. Senior leaders conduct surveys to gather information about children's wellbeing. They analyse the data from these surveys carefully to identify children who may require support with their wellbeing. The headteacher uses this data well to identify children who have otherwise hidden wellbeing needs. Staff have implemented supports for these children and subsequent surveys have identified that children's wellbeing needs have been supported successfully. The headteacher should continue with plans to build further on this approach to identify trends and patterns in wellbeing across the school and in cohorts of children.
- Staff developed successfully approaches to providing children with a nurturing learning environment in response to children's views. They developed a nurture space within the school, following useful training from Educational Psychological Services, which children access when required. This is supporting children who use this space to feel calm and be ready to learn.
- Staff use restorative approaches well to promote positive behaviour. There is a clear positive relationships and anti-bullying policy in place. Children act responsibly as play leaders and buddies to organise playground games and help everyone to feel included. Peer mentors support other children successfully to resolve disagreements with their friends. They use lanyards which provide them with questions to support restorative conversations between

children. This is supporting children very well to manage their own and others' behaviour in a positive and constructive way.

- Children experience a broad progressive health and wellbeing curriculum which runs over three years. They have a solid understanding of the factors relating to good health. Children also benefit from partnership input from Aberdeenshire Life Education Centre who support them to make healthy lifestyle choices. Most children feel they have opportunities to take part in activities beyond the school day and to get regular exercise. For example, children enjoy after school clubs such as the running, judo or football club which develop their physical fitness. Children in P6 receive training delivered by parents which helps them to learn about keeping safe when cycling. Children in P6 and P7 receive first aid training which helps them to know how to keep others safe and well. Children experience regular inputs on internet safety and demonstrate an understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.
- Children talk enthusiastically about opportunities to participate in a Forest Schools Programme. Children learn skills such as den building, making bird feeders and cooking outdoors. Older children are involved in identifying hazards and risks for younger children. This is supporting children effectively to be responsible and to understand and manage risk.
- All staff have a very good understanding of their statutory duties and responsibilities to improve outcomes for children. They engage fully in annual updates for mandatory child protection training. The headteacher follows local authority guidance appropriately when situations and needs arise and has a detailed understanding of children's individual circumstances. The headteacher tracks the attendance of children closely and attendance levels are in line with the national average.
- Children who require targeted support, including support from outside agencies, have individual education plans (IEPs). The headteacher and staff design IEPs in collaboration with partner agencies setting relevant targets with measures of success. They consider whether a child who has an IEP should have a co-ordinated support plan. The headteacher gathers the views of parents in designing IEPs. This is improving outcomes for identified children. Parents feel fully involved in planning next steps for their child's support and that their views are listened to. The headteacher should ensure that these plans record clearly the views of parents and children.
- The headteacher and staff discuss children's needs, attainment and progress formally at termly tracking meetings and through regular dialogue. They identify promptly children who require additional support with their learning or those facing barriers to learning caused by poverty related factors. The headteacher also seeks the views of pupil support assistants who provide valuable help to ensure all children requiring support access learning. Teachers and learning support staff work collaboratively to set targets for children on group or individual plans. Learning support staff deliver effective interventions to identified groups and individual children in literacy and numeracy. These interventions are having a positive impact on children's attainment. Most children requiring additional support make good progress and a minority of children are now on track with their learning as a result of this work. As a next step, the headteacher should consider regularly whether children who receive additional support require a Child's Plan in line with local authority guidance.
- All children are included, engaged and involved in the life of the school. Most children have a strong understanding of equalities and inclusion. Older children understand the difference between equality and equity and explain why this is important. Pupil voice groups support children well to express their views confidently and challenge discrimination. Last session,

children explored the concepts of activism and campaigning. They are well-placed to undertake their planned campaign on children's rights later this year.

- The headteacher takes steps to ensure that children have worthwhile opportunities to learn about different beliefs and cultures. Children learn about global goals through the curriculum. This helps children to appreciate global issues and have a very strong understanding of sustainability. Older children have a clear understanding of neurodiversity. They created an interesting display highlighting the strengths and potential challenges for different people.

### 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

- There are small numbers of children at each stage across the school. Due to this, levels of attainment are expressed in overall statements rather than for individual stages or CfE levels. Overall, attainment in literacy and English, and numeracy and mathematics is good.
- In school session 2022-2023, most children achieved national standards of attainment in reading and listening and talking. The majority of children achieved national standards in writing. Almost all children achieved national standards in numeracy and mathematics.
- Children, make good progress from prior levels of attainment. Across the school, a few children work ahead of expected levels and there are a few children who could achieve more. Most children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards individual targets with a minority making very good progress.

#### Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English. Children have meaningful opportunities to apply their literacy skills across other areas of the curriculum.

#### Listening and talking

- Almost all children are polite and articulate when speaking to others. Across the school almost all children listen and respond appropriately to others in group situations. Children use well-embedded thinking routines in their learning. As a result, children are developing their reasoning skills well and can explain their thinking successfully in an age-appropriate way.
- Most younger children successfully share their ideas with others about their likes and dislikes. Most children at the middle stages confidently discuss their preference for different authors describing their favourite characters. Most older children answer a range of literal questions. They are less confident in creating and asking inferential questions. Children across the school would benefit from speaking to a wider range of audiences. Older children need opportunities to extend their talking and listening skills through debating.

#### Reading

- Children regularly access and read a range of fiction and non-fiction books from the school library and online. Children participate in a reading club along with children from other schools which provides them with challenge in reading longer texts. There is a positive reading culture in the school and most children are keen readers.

- Most children read fluently and with expression according to their age and stage. Younger children use their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode words. Children would now benefit from further practice in reading tricky words. Older children can identify fiction and non-fiction texts. They are less confident in identifying the features of non-fiction texts for example, glossary and index. Older children identify a range of genre and summarise texts successfully with attention to the main ideas and supporting details.

## **Writing**

- The majority of younger children enjoy writing for a range of reasons, for example, to sequence events of a familiar story. The majority of children in the middle stages and upper stages successfully apply the features of different genre in their writing. Children can describe accurately when to use the correct punctuation in their writing. However, they need reminded to consistently apply this to their writing. Children would benefit from being set consistently high expectations in spelling, grammar, use of punctuation and presentation of work.

## **Numeracy and mathematics**

- Overall, almost all children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics. Across the school, children explain clearly the processes and strategies they use in number calculations.

## **Number, money and measure**

- Almost all younger children have a good knowledge and understanding of number processes in an age-appropriate way. Most children at the middle stages demonstrate well their understanding of simple fractions. They should now further develop confidence in rounding larger numbers. Almost all older children have a good understanding of number and number processes. Children calculate simple fractions, percentages and decimal fractions accurately to solve problems correctly.

## **Shape, position and movement**

- Almost all children recognise and sort common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in an age-appropriate way. Most older children identify different types of angles. Children should further develop their mathematical vocabulary to describe accurately the properties of shapes.

## **Information handling**

- Almost all younger children use their knowledge of colour and size to match and sort items in simple graphs. Almost all children at the middle and upper stages explain the features of a bar graph and answer questions successfully to demonstrate their understanding of the data. Children require more frequent opportunities to develop their information handling skills across the curriculum and in real-life contexts.

## **Attainment over time**

- The headteacher tracks children's attainment over time carefully and has detailed information dating back a number of years. Overall, children's attainment increases as they move through the school and levels of attainment have remained high over time.
- The headteacher reviews attainment data carefully to implement clear strategies to raise attainment for all. Staff identified dips in attainment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and have taken steps to address these gaps. This session there is a focus on raising attainment in writing and consolidating improvements made in numeracy last session. These targeted interventions in numeracy are impacting positively on levels of attainment for identified

children. Whole school approaches to raising attainment in writing are increasing children's engagement and enjoyment of writing.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievements**

- Across the school children's achievements are shared and celebrated widely in a range of ways. Children enjoy receiving house points and certificates for their achievements. All children participate in a pupil voice group. This is developing children's leadership and citizenship skills well and supporting them to influence change within the school.
- Older children successfully lead clubs and groups for younger children and assume full responsibility for running these clubs, demonstrating initiative and confidence. They talk clearly about the organisational, teamwork, creative and critical thinking skills they develop. Senior leaders track children's achievements inside and out of school. They use this information very effectively to identify and close gaps in children's achievements.
- Children contribute meaningfully to the local community. For example, children participate in litter picks, bulb planting and community events such as Remembrance Day. This is supporting children to be responsible citizens and gain an appreciation of their local area.
- Children have a very firm understanding of the needs of others. They participate in a number of fundraising activities to contribute to a number of different charities each year. Children demonstrate their independence in researching and choosing the charity they would like to donate to.

### **Equity for all learners**

- All staff have a good understanding of the social, economic and cultural context of the school. Staff work in close partnership with the Parent Council and wider parent body to reduce the cost of trips and excursions. This is helping to ensure that all children have opportunities to enjoy a range of cultural and sporting experiences. As a next step, the headteacher should work with children, parents and staff to develop a 'cost of the school day' policy to ensure all children have further opportunities for equity.
- This session, staff identify that children's attainment gaps are mostly in numeracy and writing. PEF is used to provide additional staffing who support children well with interventions in literacy and numeracy. These interventions are successfully closing or have closed identified attainment gaps for children who receive this support.

## 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.