Summarised inspection findings

Carron Primary School

Falkirk Council

22 August 2023

Key contextual information

Carron Primary School is a non-denominational school which is situated to the north of Falkirk, approximately two miles from the town centre. At the time of inspection, there were 301 children across 12 classes on the school roll. Most children reside in deciles five to nine of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones.

1.3 Leadership of change	very 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

- The headteacher, supported by the depute headteacher, has led the creation of an inclusive, empowering learning environment where positive relationships are prioritised. Every child is known and nurtured. Members of the school community are recognised and valued as individuals with different interests and skills. Staff and senior leaders work together very effectively to improve outcomes for children. As a result, children learn and thrive in a kind, calm, purposeful environment.

- All children, staff, parents and partners have a clear understanding of the vision, values and aims which underpin the life and work of the school. The school values of kindness, resilience, respect and responsibility are evident in all interactions between staff and children. The ethos across the school is one of high standards and expectations, underpinned by very positive relationships. Children are friendly, respectful and enthusiastic about learning.

- Children, staff and parents respect senior leaders and welcome their visibility and approachability. The headteacher, senior leaders and staff have a sound knowledge of the social and economic contexts of all children and their families. They use this knowledge very effectively to inform the rationale for Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) planning and to ensure that children's needs are met.

- The strategic leadership of headteacher is very effective. His vision is one of continuous improvement, raised attainment and opportunities for wider achievement. This is based on a very strong understanding of the needs of the whole school community and robust self-evaluation. He has carefully managed the pace of change at Carron Primary School. This is ensuring that areas for development are accurately identified and acted upon. Through successful empowerment of staff, identified improvement plan priorities are successfully embedded across the school and continually refined to ensure sustainable improvement over time. An example of this is the very successful work developing and embedding a rich culture of reading for enjoyment across the school.

- All staff contribute well to self-evaluation processes. Children's views are sought through a range of surveys. The Parent Council are involved in reviewing the school improvement plans. Parents are frequently consulted on a range of issues. This has resulted in an ownership of priorities for change and improvement across the whole school community.

- Senior leaders have established effective quality assurance arrangements to ensure and maintain high-quality learning and teaching. This includes regular class visits, sampling of work and robust tracking and monitoring discussions with teachers. Staff are provided with useful feedback to help improve their practice and approaches. Senior leaders are supporting teachers well to develop effective use of data. These approaches are helping to ensure that children make very good progress from prior levels of attainment.

- The highly committed staff team work very effectively with each other and senior leaders to improve outcomes for children. They value the planned, protected time for professional dialogue and self-evaluation and use this time effectively to work together to improve their practice. Staff and senior leaders' involvement in local authority improvement groups is influencing leadership of change outwith the school.

- The quality of leadership across the staff team is a key strength. All staff are proud of their roles in supporting change and driving improvement. Senior leaders inspire and empower staff to take on additional leadership responsibilities. For example, most teachers have carried out small tests of change projects which have impacted positively on learning and teaching approaches. Staff take a lead role in relation to digital learning, development of play pedagogy and learning for sustainability. These leadership roles have resulted in improved experiences for children across the school.

- Children in the upper stages benefit from a range of leadership opportunities. These include House Captains, members of the Carron Congress, reader leaders, digital leaders, sustainability leaders and buddies of younger children. Children are proud of the impact they have had through these roles. Children say their views are sought and acted upon, for example in relation to improved approaches to writing. Reader leaders have made a significant contribution towards embedding a culture of reading for pleasure and the achievement of the school's Gold Reading School status. There is scope now for staff to consider how to meaningfully include younger children in leadership opportunities.

- There are strong examples of effective partnership work across the school community which are having a significantly positive impact on children's experiences and outcomes. For example, partnership arrangements are ensuring effective support for families who have newly arrived in Scotland. Partnerships are supporting learning for sustainability and effective transition arrangements.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	**very 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

■ All staff across Carron Primary School ensure that there is a calm, inclusive learning environment underpinned by the school values and children's rights. Children demonstrate the values in all aspects of school life. Relationships between staff and children, and among children, are very positive and lead to almost all children being happy at school, motivated and eager to learn.

■ Across the school, almost all children are actively involved and engage very well in their learning. They listen attentively to adults and their peers during class lessons. Most children contribute confidently to class and group discussions and are keen to share their learning with others. Children contribute very effectively to the life of the school and the community through a range of leadership roles and well-planned activities. Learning for sustainability is a core feature of children's experiences. Through the 'Sustainable Carron' project, children work together across stages and with members of the wider community to grow produce in their garden and polytunnel. Children have opportunities to take their learning outdoors. They would benefit from a wider range of progressive outdoor learning which enables them to build on and develop their skills.

■ Digital floorbooks and displays of children's work evidence a wide range of high-quality learning across the curriculum. Overall, children's experiences are well matched to their interests and support the development of skills in real life contexts. Children are motivated by the range of interesting, creative learning which helps them develop a range of knowledge and skills. Children work well together in pairs and small groups to complete engaging learning activities. Most children are able to talk about their learning and explain their thinking. At all stages, a few children would benefit from increased challenge by, for example, applying skills and knowledge through open-ended, problem-solving learning experiences.

■ Significant investment in tablet computers has enriched children's learning experiences. Children now confidently use a range of digital applications to support and enhance their learning. They make effective use of a range of digital tools to share their learning with others. Children across the school are motivated by the increased range of games-based learning to practice and develop numeracy skills. Digital technology is also being well used to support children with identified barriers to learning. Teachers and children are making very effective use of digital technology to capture and share significant learning through digital floorbooks and matrix bar codes.

■ In all lessons, teachers ensure explanations and instructions are clear. They share the purpose of learning and outline the steps children need to take to be successful. As a result, children know what they are learning and why. Teachers are well placed to increase children's involvement in co-creating success criteria. This will help children to take increased ownership of their own learning. In most lessons, the pace of learning is brisk and supports children to

learn with and from their peers. Within whole class lessons, children have choice in the level of difficulty of the task they are completing. Most teachers use this approach, alongside differentiated tasks and support to meet the needs of most learners well. Almost all teachers use questioning skilfully to check for understanding.

■ In most lessons, children have choice in how they undertake or present their learning. All teachers provide verbal feedback 'in the moment' which helps children to understand how well they have achieved a set task. At times, children would benefit from clearer feedback on what they need to do next to improve further. Children are now well placed to take greater ownership of their learning. Developing further approaches to self and peer assessment will help children to review their own progress.

■ Children experience a range of learning that links knowledge and skills across different subjects. This is helping children to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of contexts. For example, children in P7 planned and delivered a MacMillan coffee morning, developing and applying skills for learning, life and work across their learning.

■ Children in P1 experience a range of opportunities to learn through play regularly. Teachers have worked together to develop their understanding of play pedagogy. They have used this learning well to create a blend of adult-initiated and child-led learning. Alongside teacher-directed learning, this range of experiences supports children well to make progress across the curriculum. Careful planning of the environment, resources and spaces support children to make choices in their learning. Teachers should continue to deepen their understanding of play pedagogy to develop further these approaches as children progress in their learning. This will help ensure that children continue to build progressively on their skills. There is potential to develop further the outdoor garden space to enable children to develop literacy and numeracy skills through their play outdoors.

■ Teachers plan children's learning effectively over a range of timescales and across the curriculum. Children have a voice in planning learning contexts that are of interest to them. They share with teachers what they already know and what they want to know more about at the start of each topic. Most children recognise that their views are sought and acted upon. For example, a survey on writing has led to the introduction of 'free writing' in response to feedback from children.

■ Teachers use a wide range of assessment information very well to monitor children's progress in literacy and numeracy. They use this assessment information effectively to plan learning with appropriate next steps for individuals and groups of children. Teachers, aided by support for learning staff, ensure that children who require additional help in their learning are supported very well. Teachers plan a range of high-quality tasks which assess how well children apply a range of skills and knowledge in new and unfamiliar contexts.

■ Teachers track the progress of individual children rigorously. Senior leaders and teachers meet termly to discuss the progress of individual children to ensure they are making the best possible progress. Where children are at risk of not maintaining good progress in their learning, teachers develop 'attainment action plans'. These plans outline strategies and interventions to support individual children. Teachers now need to ensure that they plan learning with the right level of challenge for those children who could achieve even more.

■ Teachers have worked very well together over recent years within the school, and with teachers in other schools, to improve their shared understanding of national standards. As a result of this work, teachers are more confident in the accuracy of their own professional judgements of children's progress and achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Level.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

■ Senior leaders have worked very successfully with stakeholders to develop and actively promote a clear vision for the school's curriculum rationale.

■ Teachers use progressive learning pathways developed by the local authority for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. These are based on experiences and outcomes and National Benchmarks and support children to build on prior learning. Progression pathways for all other curriculum areas have been developed by staff in school and through working in partnership with staff in cluster schools.

■ Across all stages children are learning to consider their responsibilities and contributions as citizens in school and the wider community. Teachers' planning and partnerships enable children to learn in-depth about sustainability and their role as global citizens.

■ Senior leaders and staff work very well in partnership with other agencies to enhance and enrich the curriculum for children. They have established a wide range of effective partnerships within the community to support improvements including Sanctuary Garden, Feisean nan Gaidheal and First4Kids. All stakeholders place great value on community involvement in the ethos and life of the school. As a result, partnerships are sustained, productive and contribute to the ongoing improvement of the school's curriculum.

■ Children learn Spanish at all stages and have visiting specialists for Gaelic and Mandarin in first and second level as part of their modern languages entitlement. Children's learning is progressive, taking account of prior learning.

■ All children receive their weekly entitlement to two hours of quality physical education, planned around the progression frameworks. Physical education lessons are taught by class teachers and a visiting specialist from the cluster secondary school who make good use of the school hall and outdoor areas.

■ The school provides religious observance opportunities through assemblies and links with the local church. Staff support children to respect each other's beliefs and values. Children are encouraged to express and celebrate their values and beliefs.

■ Children across all stages have some opportunities to learn outdoors. There are timetabled opportunities to work on the 'Sustainable Carron' project which is providing a depth of knowledge around food sustainability. The development of a progressive outdoor learning programme would support children to build on their skills and provide opportunities to explore learning in more varied contexts.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

■ Parents and partners appreciate the caring and supportive approach of senior leaders, teachers and support staff. They value the range of communication from staff about the work of the school. Teachers share children's learning through digital platforms regularly to keep parents informed about their children's learning experiences.

■ Parents value highly the opportunity to spend time with their child in school through events, such as Harry Potter night, Roald Dahl day and Scots Week. School events are very well attended, enjoyed and celebrated by families. As planned, senior leaders and staff should consider now how to provide more opportunities for parents to share in their children's learning opportunities in class.

■ Almost all parents feel involved in the work of the school. The Parent Council has a strategic role in school improvement and hosts a range of fundraising activities in the community, alongside the Parent Teacher Association. The range of high-quality partnership working with the local community is enhancing the learning experiences of children. This supports children well to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

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	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

■ Children learn and develop in a very positive and supportive environment. This is underpinned by the embedded values of kindness, respect, resilience and responsibility. Children are polite, respectful to others and welcoming to visitors. The headteacher and staff are highly committed to ensuring all children are valued and treated with dignity. They prioritise wellbeing as a key driver to improve children's outcomes. This is evident in all actions to achieve the school vision of 'achieving with positive relationships and a caring heart'.

■ Almost all children feel safe in school. Children describe how adults in school help them to feel safe. This includes, for example, supervision in the playground by staff who support children to understand and assess risk. A few children who are digital leaders use knowledge from the training they received to develop an improved whole school understanding of online safety. Learners, particularly at second level, can speak confidently and knowledgeably about how to keep themselves safe online.

■ Almost all children feel that they are learning to be healthy. They undertake regular exercise through a range of activities, and they understand how being active improves their long-term health. Children in the upper stages demonstrate a high level of understanding about the importance of maintaining good mental health.

■ Children feel that their rights are respected, and these permeate the work of the school. Staff are formally embedding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the work of the school. As a result, children are developing a greater awareness of their rights. Almost all classes have a class charter, and this is enhancing children's understanding of the importance of their rights.

■ Staff are skilled and proactive in identifying and addressing children's wellbeing concerns. All children complete wellbeing assessments which are used by teachers effectively to gather information and support children with their wellbeing. Children feel cared for by staff and almost all learners describe a key adult that they would be confident would help them to address any wellbeing issues. Senior leaders and staff should continue to support children to take increased ownership of actions to maintain their own wellbeing. There is scope to build on existing leadership roles, for example the P7 monitors, to provide children with a greater role in supporting peers in addressing any wellbeing issues.

■ Children benefit from a greater understanding of wellbeing through a recently updated and progressive health and wellbeing curriculum. Staff are proactive in using a range of effective partners to help children to understand wellbeing. Children across all stages are aware of the wellbeing indicators through informative and creative wall displays and regular assemblies. Children in the middle stages of the school would benefit from more strategies to be able to discuss confidently their wellbeing more clearly.

- Staff fulfil their statutory duties very well. All staff undertake the necessary safeguarding training, and all take part in further professional learning to implement the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) National Practice Model. This leads to children receiving the appropriate support to address any significant wellbeing issues.

- The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

- Children with additional support needs are supported very well by highly skilled senior staff. They are proactive in seeking out a range of effective partnerships to meet the needs of learners. Senior leaders ensure that learning targets are clear, and staff receive high-quality information which is enabling them to support children effectively with their learning. Children and their parents value opportunities to be involved in planning their support. Care experienced children are well supported by a team who know their needs well. As a result, most learners who require additional support are making good progress in their learning. Senior leaders ensure that children are benefitting from additional support through regular reviews. A next step is for senior leaders to streamline support processes and improve the consistency of teachers' input into the review process. This will improve the clarity of information and support evaluation of the impact of interventions for children who require additional support with their learning.

- Senior leaders have led a range of initiatives to improve attendance. This includes working with the Parent Council to highlight to parents the educational benefits of regular attendance. As a result, most children have very good attendance at school. Senior leaders have used the PEF to provide additional support for identified children. This is supporting children to maintain better levels of attendance and engagement.

- Children feel valued and included as a result of the caring and compassionate ethos. The well-established promoting positive relations policy, deeply rooted in nurture principles, underpins all actions across the school. Children are supported by skilled staff to understand and improve their behaviour through approaches that make them feel respected. As a result, there have been no exclusions this session and these are very low over the past five-year period. Incidents of bullying are low, and most children feel any incidents are dealt with well by staff.

- Almost all children who have joined the school recently, including a few learners from other countries, feel welcomed and valued members of the school community. Staff encourage these learners to share their experience and culture with their peers. This is resulting in children at all stages developing a greater awareness of different cultures. Through partnership working, children joining the school from other countries are supported well to address any gaps in their learning.

- Almost all children feel that the school helps them to understand and respect other people. Staff promote diversity through wall displays, assemblies and through various curriculum initiatives. The school library contains a range of books to help children understand diversity. Children learn from well-considered whole school events to mark Eid, Chinese New Year and Black History month. In the upper stages, children use interdisciplinary learning opportunities and class novels to understand equality issues. Senior leaders and staff should develop opportunities for children to learn through the curriculum in greater depth about equality groups and how to challenge discrimination.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	**very 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

- Overall, attainment across the school is very good. A few children at most stages across the school are exceeding national standards in literacy and numeracy. Overall, children are making very good progress from their prior levels of attainment. Teachers across the school continue to raise attainment following dips arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Most children who require additional support with their learning, including those with English as an additional language, are making good progress from their prior levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. A few children are making very good progress.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children are making very good progress in literacy from prior levels of attainment.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children are highly articulate and listen respectfully to others. Children negotiate with each other well during group tasks, paired and play activities. Children on track to achieve early and first levels can talk confidently about texts. At second level, almost all children ask and answer questions confidently to deepen their understanding of new topics.

Reading

- Children across the school benefit from the embedded culture of reading for enjoyment. They have access to a wide range of quality texts through the school library, digital devices and class reading areas. As a result, children have a love of reading and have developed a range of skills to engage effectively with unfamiliar texts. At early level, almost all children use taught sounds to blend and decode simple words confidently. At first level, most children use context clues to predict what might happen next. They skim and scan texts to identify main ideas and find information. At second level, all children can talk about the core skills they are developing to summarise texts.

Writing

- At early level, most children produce detailed line drawings and can write sentences independently using capital letters and full stops. At first level, the majority of children use verbs and adjectives well to enhance their writing. They can identify the key features of what makes texts interesting, using this in their own work consistently. By second level, most children use a wide range of skilful punctuation and organise ideas logically in paragraphs. They write across a range of different genres and engage their reader very well with complex vocabulary. Children have regular opportunities for personalisation and choice in writing. This has improved children's creativity and has helped to raise attainment. Improving presentation and handwriting skills would help children write with greater pace and fluency.

Numeracy and mathematics
- Overall, children are making very good progress from prior levels of attainment. Teachers approaches to mental maths are impacting positively on children's confidence, accuracy, and speed of numeracy calculations.

Number, money and measure
- Across all stages, children are confident in a range of number processes appropriate to their age and stage of development. Children who are on track to achieve early level count confidently within 30. They can recognise odd and even numbers to 10 and can use strategies to carry out simple addition and subtraction. Children on track to achieve first level describe accurately the value of a digit in numbers to 1000 and beyond. They are less confident working with fractions and converting between simple units of measure. Children who are on track to achieve second level are confident in converting between fractions, decimal fractions and percentages. Children at first and second level are confident using a range of numeracy skills to solve problems involving time. Children are less confident in calculating area and perimeter.

Shape, position and movement
- At all stages across the school children can discuss the different features and properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects appropriate to their age. Younger children discuss and describe shape through their play. Older children can discuss how to use the property of shapes to create designs. Children on track to achieve early level understand and can use the language of position and direction in their play. Children on track to achieve first and second levels have a good understanding of angle and symmetry. They are not yet confident discussing grid references and coordinates.

Information handling
- Across the school, children gather and use information in a variety of ways. Children on track to achieve first level can discuss how to gather data using tally marks and can present information in simple bar graphs. Children on track to achieve second level can discuss a range of ways of presenting information. A few children at second level can discuss when a line graph would be helpful, for example, in examining profit and loss.

Attainment over time
- Overall, attainment has remained high across the school over a period of years. The slight decrease in attainment in 2018-19 is as a result of teachers improving their understanding of national standards. This has led to more accurate teacher professional judgements.

- Attainment in writing, particularly at P4, has been impacted by the school building closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. New whole school approaches to developing writing are continuing to improve attainment in this area across the school. Teachers have continued to raise attainment across the school through tracking robustly the progress of individual children. Current predicted levels of attainment clearly demonstrate the significant positive impact of strategies to raise attainment across the school. Senior leaders and staff should now develop approaches to track children's progress and attainment across all curricular areas.

Overall quality of learner's achievements
- Children attend a range of lunchtime clubs, including digital learning clubs led by digital leaders. Children participate regularly in a range of competitions such as cross-country, rugby and basketball. These events are helping to develop children's teamwork, resilience and confidence. Children in the upper stages have regular opportunities to be buddies with younger children and to participate in a very impactful intergenerational reading project. Children's achievements within and outwith school are celebrated in a variety of ways including through social media and end of year awards.

- Children in the upper stages benefit from a range of leadership opportunities. These leadership roles provide children with opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. Children can articulate how these leadership roles have improved their confidence, organisational and communication skills. As planned, children should now be supported to profile the acquisition of these skills across the curriculum.

Equity for all learners
- Senior leaders and staff have a very sound knowledge of the social and economic contexts of their children and families, including financial pressures. They take sensitive and effective action to mitigate against barriers children face, for example in relation to attendance.

- Senior leaders' rationale for PEF spending is based on a robust analysis of a range of data including poverty-related attainment and other gaps. This allows senior leaders to work closely with staff to identify and target the needs of specific groups of children. PEF is focused on provision of staff to work closely with groups of children to improve attendance, engagement, confidence and wellbeing. Senior leaders should continue to track the effectiveness of all funded interventions in order to evidence the accelerated impact on raising attainment.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Approaches to using digital technology are supporting and enhancing learning experiences for children across the school. Significant investment in tablet computers through the local authority's 'Connected Falkirk' approach has provided children with increased access to digital devices. 'Connected Learning', the local authority's framework of training and development, has supported and enhanced practice in using digital technologies. As a result, digital technology is helping to enrich children's learning experiences, increasing children's enjoyment in learning, and supporting raised attainment.

Staff have enhanced their own and children's skills in digital literacy. Children in the upper school who are digital leaders play an integral part in the delivery of the digital strategy for the whole school. Children across the school confidently use a range of digital applications to support and enhance their learning. For example, children make effective use of green screen technology to create adverts and news reports. Children are motivated by the increased range of games-based learning which is helping to develop a range of skills including numeracy skills. Digital technology is also being well used to support children with identified barriers to learning. Teachers and children are making very effective use of digital technology to capture and share learning through digital floorbooks and matrix bar codes. Digital leaders in the upper school share their learning and digital expertise widely. They create 'how to' video guides and run lunchtime clubs for younger children where they focus on acquisition of new digital skills. They use their knowledge from training to develop an improved whole school understanding of online safety.

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.