

Summarised inspection findings

Bachlaw Learning Centre

Independent

9 September 2025

Key contextual information

Bachlaw Learning Centre is an all through independent residential special school, located in Banff, Aberdeenshire. The school supports children and young people with a range and complexity of additional support needs stemming from social, emotional and behavioural barriers. Local authorities request a care and education placement for children and young people at the school, following an assessment of needs.

At the time of inspection, the school's registration is for up to 10 children and young people. There are seven children and young people currently on the school roll. The school has four Executive Directors and a voluntary Board of Advisors. The headteacher leads the education team supported by a teacher and support staff. They work with residential care managers, care staff and a team of social workers to meet the holistic education and care needs of the children and young people. Children and young people are educated in a modern built school surrounded by woodland. The school sits on a 10 acre site with a wide range of outdoor play spaces and has a small hold farm and a creel boat. The residential accommodation shares the same site as the school.

Overall, children and young people's attendance at school was well above the national average for special schools. There have been no instances of exclusion in the last few years.

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
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- All staff across Bachlaw Learning Centre have very well established nurturing relationships with children and young people underpinned by trust and respect. Teachers and support staff work very well together in partnership to deliver learning, based on the positive relationships. They have a depth in knowledge and high expectations of all children and young people. Almost all children and young people at Bachlaw Learning Centre begin their placement following a prolonged period of interrupted learning. Staff use targeted interventions very well to support learners' re-engagement in learning. This leads to almost all children and young people engaging appropriately in learning experiences within a few weeks of starting their placements.
 - All children and young people at Bachlaw Learning Centre have experienced trauma and adverse experiences. They experience barriers to regulating their emotions or expressing their feelings in a way that is immediately understood. Staff are highly attuned, responsive and caring to each individual. Children and young people feel safe, listened to and valued. Staff recognise the need for consistency, structure and routine and apply these consistently across the day. They use their knowledge and positive relationships to support children and young people very well to regulate their behaviour and effectively re engage in planned learning activities. As a result, there is a calm learning environment in which children and young people are settled and engaged purposefully in their learning.

- Children and young people have well-planned opportunities to lead on aspects of their own learning. They benefit from meaningful personalisation of learning. For example, within topic-based learning, they can choose an area of research that interests them. At the end of a project, children and young people create knowledge based posters to summarise their learning. These are displayed around the classroom as a mark of their new learning and achievement. Young people are proud of these displays. Staff should now consider how they can further develop their project-based learning approach. There is a need to provide more opportunities for children and young people to work together in pairs or groups, in learning to develop their understanding of others' views, preferences and opinions. This will help them to develop their shared interests and improve further their collaborative, communicative and social skills.
- Almost all children and young people enjoy participating in well planned practical learning through activities such as fishing, farming and forest schools. Learning through real life contexts is improving their knowledge of learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Through these activities, learners experience success and develop confidence, resilience and a sense of responsibility. Staff should continue to ensure that all planned learning, including the many opportunities for wider achievement, is more progressive and leads to increased certification and qualification in particular at the senior phase. This will further help young people understand the value of the experience and the subsequent attainment they can achieve through enjoyable learning activities.
- In most lessons, teachers use appropriate desk-based activities set at the correct level of difficulty and well matched to individual learner needs. This ensures that the pace of learning is brisk, and most learners make good progress in their learning. Teachers and staff provide effective bespoke support to individuals offering different levels of support. In a few lessons, there are a few examples where the focus to complete tasks and workbook pages overtakes the learning. Teachers should continue to support all children and young people to develop a clearer understanding of the concepts and skills they are developing. A few should be supported to work more independently over time with reduced levels of support from adults.
- In a majority of lessons, teachers use technology effectively to enhance and extend learning. Teachers are at the early stages of supporting children and young people to develop digital skills in a progressive manner. Teachers make effective use of a small range of accessibility features to help make learning more accessible for a few learners who have literacy barriers. For example, children and young people have the option to type their written work and regularly create presentations to share their learning making use of spelling and grammar checkers.
- Learning centre staff effectively employ a range of assessments to identify the needs of learners and plan next steps. On arrival at the learning centre, children and young people undertake initial useful baseline assessments in literacy and numeracy to identify clearly their current levels of attainment and any gaps in learning. This process is repeated over time to track and measure progress which is leading to closing gaps and accelerating progress for most learners in reading, spelling and writing. In the classroom, staff use a range of assessment tools effectively to assess the progress children and young people are making in learning.
- Teachers engage children and young people in regular beneficial learning conversations. They use the outcomes of summative assessments to help learners understand the progress they are making. For example, results from reading and spelling check-ups. Children and young people are also encouraged to self-assess their progress. Most children and young people know the progress they are making in their learning. However, they have a more limited

understanding of the skills they are acquiring over time. Teachers should now identify more ways to support children and young people to appreciate the skills and attributes they are developing through their learners' experiences.

- Teachers regularly engage in internal moderation activities and have established effective external moderation partnerships with local primary and secondary schools. As a result, they are growing in confidence when making professional judgements and developing an understanding of shared national standards. This is supporting them to assess and plan new learning that is progressive and builds more consistently on children and young people's prior knowledge in core areas of the curriculum.
- Teachers are developing well their ongoing assessment skills by engaging in professional discussions with each other around expected standards. They use this information appropriately in learning conversations with children and young people. At times, teachers rely more routinely on summative assessment to track the progress of children and young people's learning. On a few occasions, summative assessment information can drive learning and prevent teachers using ongoing assessment information to influence next steps in learning. As planned, teachers should continue to develop their skills in using a range of evidence when evaluating children and young people's progress. For example, increase the use of formative assessment approaches to track learning and inform next steps across wider areas of the curriculum. This will support teachers' accuracy in making professional judgements about the progress children and young people are making in their learning more widely than literacy and numeracy.
- The school currently plans for learning using children and young people's individual education plans. These focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing with a focus on reducing barriers they face in their learning. The connections between planning, tracking and monitoring are most robust in numeracy. As a result, children progress well in this area. Cross curriculum projects designed on Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes are planned on a whole class basis. Staff use their knowledge of children and young people to differentiate learning well. Staff should now adopt their approach to planning, tracking and monitoring of literacy and numeracy in other curriculum areas. Staff should ensure appropriate differentiation is planned for across all areas of learning and the curriculum. This will maximise learning and accelerate further the positive progress children and young people make in their learning.

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, young people. 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

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

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English is good and attainment in numeracy and mathematics is very good. Young people in the broad general education (BGE) are working at first and second level experiences and outcomes of CfE. All young people require additional support in their learning. A few young people are capable of achieving more and should be provided with further challenge in their learning to maximise fully their attainment.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Most young people are making good progress in listening and talking and reading. Most young people are making very good progress in writing. A few young people are capable of working at higher levels.

Listening and talking

- Most young people are making good progress in listening and talking. In the classroom and wider social settings, young people can engage well with others, knowing when and how to listen, when to ask questions and how to respond respectfully. Children and young people speak clearly when delivering important messages such as a mayday call should they be required on their creel boat. They are confident in presenting to an audience and express their views clearly using appropriate vocabulary. Young people would benefit from further opportunities to develop their talking skills such as debating and engaging in topical discussions where young people may have differing views. This will provide them with meaningful contexts to develop their learning, strengthen their resilience and manage their emotions when faced with the views of others which may differ from their own.

Reading

- Overall, most young people are making good progress in reading. They read with confidence and fluency and can read aloud with expression. Teachers schedule time each day for personal reading and encourage learners to read for enjoyment. Staff should continue to develop the school library and consider more creative and digital approaches to support young people to access a wider range of texts. This should help to reduce literacy barriers and develop further their love of reading while support more independent access a wider range of books and texts for enjoyment and interest.

Writing

- Most young people are making very good progress in their writing skills. Teachers work highly effectively with residential staff to ensure that young people have enjoyable and meaningful experiences during holiday periods which provide a source of inspiration for independent writing. Learners are motivated by the opportunity created by this to author their own stories. They write for a variety of purposes and increase the length of their writing over time. Young people write in sentences and paragraphs and are developing very well their handwriting,

spelling and letter formation. Teachers encourage young people to take pride in the presentation of their work and this is leading to improved presentation of work across the school.

Senior Phase

- At the senior phase, all young people are successfully working towards achieving National Qualifications awards at National 4 and 5. They are increasingly able to apply English knowledge and skills to support them in real life situations. For example, when socialising in community settings, when they participate in a range of competitions and write to pen friends in Africa.

Attainment in numeracy

- Most young people are making very good progress in their numeracy and mathematics. Across the BGE, most young people make very good progress in number processes and measure. Most young people can accurately apply maths in every day relevant context, in particular when working on the creel boat and building structures in the small holding farm. This is accelerating children and young people's progress very well and sustaining their interests. As a result, almost all learners state mathematics is their preferred subject at school.

Number, money, measure

- Young people use a range of instruments and mathematical language correctly when measuring length and use this in real life contexts to measure, for example when fishing, or building chicken runs and structures in the small hold farm. Young people carry out measurement calculations, choosing the most appropriate measure device and record accurately their results. They understand the concept of profit and loss and calculate accurately when engaging in enterprise activities when setting prices and working with a budget. Young people understand compass points and plot and record their position using coordinates. Almost all children and young people apply their learning in a real life context such as using GPS systems when on the boat and instruments of measure to relay the boat's location to the coast guard should this be required.

Shape, position and movement

- At first level, young people use compass points and directional language accurately and identify a range of angles. At second level, young people use appropriate mathematical language to describe and classify angles and find the radius and diameter of shapes.

Information handling

- At first and second levels, young people accurately answer questions based on a range of data and extract information correctly from a range of tables, graphs and charts. Teachers support young people very well to collect and display data in meaningful and relevant ways such as using the fishing markets and farm shows. When working with data and information in a real life context, children and young people are increasing their confidence and are able to link mathematical concepts well, for example when selecting and categorising the size of lobsters, crabs and fish caught and calculating market value based on their collated information.

Senior Phase

- At the senior phase, all young people are successfully working towards achieving National Qualifications awards at National 4 and 5. Young people are developing very well their skills and abilities to analyse information, solve problems involving number, money, time and measure. They are increasingly able to apply mathematic knowledge and skills to support them in real life situations, for example when planning an itinerary for overseas trips.

Attainment over time

- Most children and young people at Bachlaw Learning Centre achieve very high levels of attendance above the national average for the special sector. Senior leaders track attendance effectively. School staff work very closely and highly effectively with residential staff to support children and young people to attend school regularly. All staff have a clear and shared view that high attendance leads to improved outcomes for all young people providing clear routines and structures to their days. This helps to maximise and accelerate the progress children and young people make in their learning.
- Taking account of their additional support needs and barriers to learning, most children and young people at both BGE and senior phase attain very well over time. A few children and young people have made significant progress compared to previous school placements. A range of planning, tracking and reporting structures provide robust evidence that young people in the BGE make very good progress over time. As planned, they should continue to explore ways to capture this information in a more streamlined way. This will better support them to analyse available data to examine how well individual learners are progressing over time across levels within the BGE, across all areas of the curriculum.
- At the senior phase, all young people are attaining a number of National Qualifications and wider awards including DOE bronze and silver levels. Most young people attain full course awards at National 4, with a few attaining at National 5. Almost all young people attain numeracy and mathematics and English qualifications at National 4 and 5. Most young people gaining awards across a small range of curriculum areas, including health and wellbeing, history, science and art and design. The head teacher can demonstrate they have raised attainment over time at the senior phase with learner gaining more full awards, at a higher level, year on year. A few learners working at National 4 should be challenged to work towards achieving more qualifications at National 5 or above in a wider range of curriculum areas to accelerate further their attainment.
- The school places an emphasis on preparing young people in the BGE and senior phase for moving on from Bachlaw Learning Centre. As a result of their drive to raise attainment and support young people to manage themselves and regulate their emotions, the school has successfully returned a few young people to full time mainstream school. At the point of transition from school, all young people in the last few years have moved on to gain employment and a few to further education to study at degree level. All leavers in the last few years have moved on to positive and sustained destinations.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children and young people enjoy celebrating their successes with the school community and are proud of their achievements. They receive a range of certificates, super achiever awards to highlight achievements in their learning, and personal development. Through these awards, children and young people can recognise what they can do well and how this contributes positively to their sense of self-worth. They can see how they contribute to the life of the school.
- All children and young people are very successfully developing important skills for learning and life. Supported very effectively by staff, most children and young people are developing very well their ability to regulate their behaviour and manage their emotions. Children and young people use strategies well to avoid becoming distressed or disengaged from their learning. They are increasingly able to work very well in whole school and class groups, developing team work and resilience skills. As a result, they are gaining an improved sense of wellbeing, making and sustaining friendships with each other. The number of incidents of challenging behaviour and use of safe holds is very low.

- Supported effectively by a range of skilled staff and partners, the quality of learners' achievements is a strength of the school. Children and young people participate purposefully in a wide range of personal achievement activities, join community and overseas programmes and activities which develop very well their four capacities and their attributes. These activities include school committees, community initiatives, international and local volunteering, and outdoor education. As a result, learners are building skills in leadership, resilience, working with others, sustainability and global citizenship. At the senior phase, most young people participate successfully in a meaningful volunteering and work placement closely aligned to their career aspiration. Before and after school clubs and hobbies are encouraged to allow children to develop their interests and skills. This is leading well to children and young people being able to develop skills such as horse riding, join local football teams, become active members of local youth organisations and looking after animals.
- The school places a significant focus on developing children and young people's social and emotional skills, developing their holistic wellbeing and promoting learning, life and employability skills in a real-life context. Staff provide high quality opportunities for young people to build their skills and gain practical experience in a wide range of real world settings in the local community and in overseas visits and cultural exchanges. This includes fishing on the boat and looking after animals. As a result, almost all young people are developing successfully skills and attributes that are both relevant and important for them to be successful in life and to move on to positive destinations. As a next step, the school should review how these opportunities can lead to more formal accredited awards to evidence fully the high-quality work children and young people achieve through these experiences.
- Young people in the senior phase have a very good awareness of the pathways into specific jobs including the qualifications needed. Staff provide high levels of support to match young people into relevant after school clubs and organisations, to support them to develop their experiences in areas that interest them. Young people in the senior phase would benefit from being more able to recognise and articulate their emerging life and employability skills. This will help them be more able to self-advocate and discuss their skills and attributes when they prepare to move on from school.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have a detailed understanding of the additional support needs and the socio-economic context of all children and young people including care experienced learners. Senior leaders are highly effective in working with partners to ensure all children and young people are fully participating in their education. They ensure that all children and young people have accessible and meaningful experiences and activities at school. This is leading to children and young people participating in a wider range of activities in and outside of school, developing well their social skills.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Writing

- Most young people are making very good progress in their writing skills. Teachers work with residential staff very well to ensure that young people have enjoyable and meaningful experiences during holiday periods which provide a source of inspiration for independent writing. This approach supports children and young people highly effectively to develop their motivation and interests in creating and authoring their own stories. Over time it builds a positive account of and young people's experiences which they reflect on with a sense of achievement and positive memories supporting their holistic learn and sense of wellbeing and achievement.

Achievements

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- Supported effectively by a range of skilled staff and partners, the quality of learners' achievement is a strength of the school. Children and young people participate purposefully in a wide range of personal achievement activities, join community and overseas programmes and activities which develop very well their four capacities and their attributes. These activities include school committees, community initiatives, international and local volunteering, and outdoor education. As a result, learners are building skills in leadership, resilience, working with others, sustainability and global citizenship. At the senior phase, most young people participate successfully in a meaningful volunteering and work placement closely aligned to their career aspiration. Before and after school clubs and hobbies are encouraged to allow children to develop their interests and skills. This is leading well to children and young people developing high quality skills for learning and life and to highly positive post school destinations. This includes returning to mainstream school, entering the workforce and gaining advanced educational qualifications at further education placements.

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.