

# Summarised inspection findings

**St Mary's RC Primary School (Polbeth)**

West Lothian Council

17 June 2025

Key contextual information

St Mary’s Primary School is a denominational school which serves the communities of Polbeth and West Calder. The headteacher has been in post since 2021 and was the depute headteacher for two years prior. She is supported by a 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) depute headteacher and 1.6 FTE principal teachers. There are 171 children arranged across eight mainstream classes and three enhanced resource base (ERB) classes. Sixty-four percent of children live within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles 1 to 3. Thirty-two percent of children are eligible for free school meals and around 50% of children receive a clothing grant. There has been one exclusion in the past year. The school reports that 49% of children have additional support needs. This is compared with 31% in primary schools in the local authority and 30% in primary schools nationally. Since August 2024, the associated secondary school has been St. Margaret’s Academy. It was previously associated with St. Kentigern’s High School before a school consultation led to change the catchment areas.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment	good
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>learning and engagement</li><li>quality of teaching</li><li>effective use of assessment</li><li>planning, tracking and monitoring</li></ul>	

- The headteacher works well with the staff team to ensure that children's rights and positive relationships are at the heart of the school's work. They have created a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment where children feel valued, respected, and supported. All staff contribute well to a culture that prioritises wellbeing and positive relationships.
- Staff ensure successfully that almost all children are motivated and engaged in their learning. They connect well with children during almost all lessons. Children ask questions freely and enjoy taking responsibility for their learning. Staff support children well to talk about the school values and children understand how this helps them to engage well in learning. For example, teachers make regular reference to providing a safe environment when children are working independently. Staff promote habits of highly effective learners and citizens. Almost all children understand these well and can discuss these in relation to their learning. Children enjoy their learning and are eager and responsible participants in most learning experiences. Staff should continue to develop approaches to involve children in planning and leading their learning. This can enhance children’s positive engagement in learning.
- Relationships between staff and children, and between children and their peers are very positive. Almost all teachers have adapted their classroom environments to reflect the needs of all children, including calm spaces and areas to support active learning. Senior leaders put plans in place to ensure that they assess the risk which individual children’s behaviour might present. They have effective pro-active strategies which they incorporate in positive response plans if required. Individualised education plans outline supportive and pre-emptive strategies which work well for identified children to help them to self-regulate. Staff actions are in line with the ‘Promoting Positive Relationships’ policy, which includes anti-bullying and equalities policies. Staff understand these policies well. They work well together to ensure that the

positive aims of the policy and the school values of trust, honesty, respect, friendship, safety and perseverance are evident in their daily interactions with children.

- Most teachers understand and make good use of the school's learning, teaching and assessment policy. Almost all teachers explain the purpose of learning well and children can discuss how they will be successful in their learning. In most lessons, teachers explain the relevance of the task well, linking activities to the world of work and other contexts. They link learning to the school values and to the habits of highly effective learners. In almost all lessons, children identify how they will apply their learning across the curriculum. In a few lessons however, this process takes too long and results occasionally in children having less time to complete tasks or to extend their learning. Senior leaders should work with staff to achieve consistency in this aspect of teaching across the school. This should ensure that all lessons are paced appropriately and are sufficiently challenging for all children.
- Teachers plan learning, teaching and assessment well to meet the needs of children who require additional support with their learning. Senior leaders maintain a clear focus on cohorts of learners, such as children who are care-experienced, those affected by financial insecurity or children attending the ERB. Senior leaders employ an effective, systematic approach to identifying needs. They work with class teachers well to produce class-assessment overviews, identifying emerging issues and appropriate supports. Staff use data they gather before, during and after interventions to monitor their effectiveness. Senior leaders meet with groups of children to discuss their learning progress in 'connected quality improvement activities'. These help children to understand their areas of strength and their next steps in learning. As a result of this collaborative approach, most children who require support know and understand their own learning needs well.
- Staff ensure that all children contribute effectively to the life of the school and in community events. All children participate in committees or skills development groups which help to improve the school and its community. These include literacy, numeracy, environmental and rights-respecting groups. Children devise aims and hold assemblies to raise awareness of these. This is supporting children to speak in public and is increasing their confidence in asserting their views. For example, the literacy committee gathered views on how to spend Parent Council funds to upgrade class libraries and presented their findings at an assembly. As they move through the school, children become increasingly articulate about the transferable skills they are developing. They are beginning to understand the concepts of active citizenship and collective responsibility. Staff should continue now to increase opportunities for children to drive change by embedding their approach to increasing learner voice and participation across the school.
- Teachers plan lessons well and make effective use of outdoor spaces to deliver a wide range of progressive outdoor learning experiences. Children learn about forest skills, growing food for use in cooking and for outdoor physical education activities. Almost all children are active and healthy, benefitting from high quality and progressive physical activity which enhances their team skills and physical fitness.
- At early level, teachers adapt children's play experiences appropriately. Teachers make effective use of classroom and outside spaces. Teachers plan outdoor learning to provide valuable opportunities to develop children's gross motor play. Teachers provide an enjoyable range of child-led and adult-directed experiences. Children make suggestions about how to use their space, for example there is a temporary hairdresser in the classroom. Staff support children well to practice skills in different contexts, such as writing lists in the home corner and there are regular thoughtful interactions which support children's engagement.

- Teachers use digital technology for a range of purposes to enhance children's learning and to gather assessment evidence. All staff use interactive whiteboards to plan and provide structure to lessons. The digital skills committee contributes ideas on how to improve digital learning throughout the school. Staff should continue to develop their use of technology, ensuring that children have increased opportunities to demonstrate their skills, particularly for information handling in mathematics and numeracy.
- Almost all teachers use written and verbal feedback well. A few teachers link bar-matrix codes to videos of children describing how group interventions are supporting their learning. This helps children reflect on their learning and understand their next steps.
- In almost all lessons, teachers use formative assessment strategies to check children's understanding. In a few lessons, children's 'in the moment' feedback does not represent their true understanding. Children show a 'thumbs up', but do not always understand the task. In these lessons, teachers need to use questioning more effectively to gauge children's learning. Senior leaders should now continue to embed a consistent approach to high-quality, effective and reciprocal feedback.
- Staff plan appropriately over different timescales to meet the needs of learners, and use a useful assessment calendar to plan summative assessments. Senior leaders use national Benchmarks in professional dialogue with teachers, to support and challenge staff in moderating their professional judgements. Senior leaders should now re-establish work with colleagues within their local cluster to inform moderation and improve teachers' shared understanding and judgement of a level.

## 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

## 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good. Most children by the end of P1 achieve early level in literacy and numeracy. By the end of P4, the majority of children achieve expected levels in literacy and numeracy. By the end of P7, almost all children are expected to achieve expected levels in listening and talking. The majority of children will achieve reading and writing and numeracy. Most children who require additional support are making good progress against agreed targets.

### Attainment in literacy and English

Overall, children make good progress in reading, writing and listening and talking.

### Listening and talking

- Across the school, children are confident to talk and share opinions and ideas. Almost all children listen well to instructions and explanations from their teachers. At early level, all children enjoy listening to stories. They would benefit from more opportunities to learn about rhyme. At first level, most children take turns at the appropriate time when engaging with others. Children should continue to be supported to develop asking and answering questions in response. At second level, almost all children show respect for others' viewpoints and offer their own opinions. They should continue to develop the skills to build on the contributions of others.

### Reading

- At early level, most children use their knowledge of sounds to read simple and familiar words. Most children can answer questions to predict what will happen next in a story. They should continue to develop their knowledge of non-fiction texts. At first level, children read with expression, using a range of strategies to decode unfamiliar words. Children need support to develop their knowledge of how to locate key information using the contents and index pages of a book. A few children are exceeding expected levels and teachers should develop deeper learning experiences for them. At second level, most children can read unfamiliar texts with fluency. Children would benefit from developing their understanding of concepts such as similes and metaphors.

### Writing

- At early level, most children form lower-case letter legibly. They should continue to write to reflect their own experiences and feelings. At first level, children are writing for a variety of purposes. They are using notes well to plan and organise their work. Children should extend their writing further using feedback from the teacher. At second level, most children write persuasive texts, using appropriate language. Children would benefit from developing a wider range of punctuation within their work. Across the school, children would benefit from having

opportunities to work on feedback provided and review more regularly their personal writing targets.

### **Attainment in Numeracy and mathematics**

- Overall, the majority of children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.
- Children at all levels are more confident with number and number processes than other aspects of numeracy and mathematics. Across the school, the majority of children would benefit from activities that help them retain, deepen and consolidate their learning and from using correct mathematical language more regularly.

### **Number, money and measure**

- At early level, almost all children demonstrate a strong understanding of mathematical concepts. They order numbers to 30 confidently and identify numbers of objects without counting them. They should continue to embed their understanding of simple fractions. At first level, children use mental agility and other mathematical strategies well. Most children estimate length of objects and name the appropriate units for measuring successfully. They are less confident using fractions and calculations with money. At second level, most children use mental agility to complete basic calculations, placing numbers in order correctly, including negative numbers. A minority of children round to nearest decimal point and whole numbers. Overall, children at second level should develop their skills in calculating fractions of a quantity and in calculations using money.

### **Shape, position and movement**

- At early level, almost all children identify two dimensional shapes correctly. Almost all children understand and follow simple directional instructions. At first level, almost all children identify two-dimensional shapes. A few children require practice using the correct language to describe the properties of angles. At second level, almost all children can identify two-dimensional shapes but could not yet use mathematical terms to describe three-dimensional objects. A minority of children use correct mathematical terms related to triangles and angles and to identify and describe lines of symmetry.

### **Information handling**

- At early level, almost all children interpret a simple graph, with support. Children would benefit from using charts and interpreting this information at the appropriate level. At first level, most children explain confidently how to gather and record information using tally charts. The majority of children describe accurately the key features of graphs. At second level, almost all children extract information from a range of charts. Children are less confident when describing how to carry out calculations using data from graphs, such as expressing their use of averages.

### **Attainment over time**

- Attainment over time shows that there has been fluctuating data in literacy and numeracy across the school. Staff are now undertaking significant work to analyse and make good use of the data which is available to them to plan appropriate next steps in learning. The school should continue to develop this work. At first and second levels, attainment in literacy has improved over the last four years. The school should focus on accelerating numeracy attainment at second level. The school should continue to develop consistency of teachers' expectations of a level.
- Attendance in the school is in line with the national average. The school has a robust attendance strategy supported by the family support worker and attendance is improving. The school identified lower attendance on Friday mornings. Senior leaders worked with the



associated secondary school to offer craft design and technology activities. This is leading to improved attendance for a group of learners.

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

- Children are proud of their achievements and celebrate these at whole school events and within classes. Staff display achievements prominently on wall displays across the school and on social media. Children record the skills they can demonstrate in a 'Passport of Experience'. This is helping children understand how to transfer these skills to other activities.
- Children are developing their leadership, social and critical thinking skills well through clubs such as cooking, gardening, block construction, football and netball. Enthusiastic staff and community members support these activities well and ensure that children's views shape the development of the clubs. Children talk positively about these experiences and describe the meta skills that they achieve through these activities.
- Staff work well together to ensure that children receive national accreditation, such as reading and sports leadership awards. The numeracy committee has created a credit union bank and was able to provide each child in the school with £1 to enable them to open an account. This helps children understand the value of saving and links numeracy to daily life well.

### **Equity for all learners**

- All staff have a strong understanding of the socio-economic background of their children and families. They know and understand the challenges and barriers to learning that affect their school community.
- Senior leaders ensure that school activities are free or highly subsidised. They use Parent Council funds or Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to support most activities. All children have access to a free breakfast club and snacks during the day. As a result, they have reduced the cost of the school day to almost zero. This ensures that all children can participate fully in all aspects of school life. Staff support children and families sensitively and very effectively.
- Senior leaders and staff are very committed to ensuring equity for all children and their families. They have undertaken clear and detailed PEF planning. Senior leaders and teachers use a range of data well to identify gaps in children's learning and plan appropriate interventions, either universal, targeted or intensive. These include targeted literacy and numeracy interventions. Staff track the efficacy of all interventions using an authority PEF tool and they evaluate regularly using a range of effective strategies. Literacy interventions are having a positive impact on children's progress, and newer numeracy interventions are beginning to demonstrate impact.



### Context

The enhanced resource base (ERB) is a non-denominational resource, which supports 18 children with a range of additional support needs from across West Lothian Council. The ERB comprises three classroom spaces and a sensory room situated on the upper floor of the school building. Children attending the ERB have full access to the school's resources, such as the gym hall. The ERB is staffed with a principal teacher, three teachers and six advanced pupil support workers.

### QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- All staff establish and maintain very positive relationships with children in the ERB. Children come to school each day keen to learn. They settle quickly in class each morning and enjoy their learning. Children's learning experiences are appropriately challenging and matched to their additional support needs very well. All children follow highly personalised curricular pathways, which provide them with opportunities to choose how they will learn. This includes accessing appropriate digital technologies to support them to access their learning. All staff develop a very good understanding of how each child communicates. Children know they will be listened to. This helps them to be able to express their opinions and tell adults what they need. As a result, children know that they are valued and that all staff have high aspirations for them.
- The school values underpin learning and teaching in the ERB very effectively. All staff show the highest levels of respect to each child. This supports the calm, purposeful learning environment evident in the ERB. Children behave very well and are respectful towards each other, taking account of their additional support needs. Teachers use a wide range of teaching approaches and environments effectively to enrich children's learning experiences. For example, they use the outdoor classroom to help children to develop their literacy skills in an environment where they feel most comfortable. In most lessons, teachers use digital resources effectively to support children to make progress in their learning.
- Teachers explanations and instructions are clear. They use simple language and repetition to ensure children understand, as best possible, what they are learning. Staff observe children closely and intervene, when necessary, to ensure children maintain their focus on their learning. All staff are highly adept at supporting children who become dysregulated to reengage quickly in their learning. Staff use praise effectively to help children know when they have been successful.
- All staff have a good understanding of each child's individual additional support needs prior to placement at the school as a result of initial transition processes. This supports teachers and support staff well to plan how they will best meet each child's needs. Teachers use a range of assessments to assess each child's skills, qualities and attributes. Staff observe children closely each day. This helps them to evaluate how well each child is progressing with their learning. Teachers' assessment of children's learning is integral to how they plan lessons, which support children to make progress in their learning. Senior leaders have established links with teachers in ERBs in other local schools. Teachers are now beginning to meet with colleagues working in similar environments. This is beginning to support them to develop their understanding of national standards. Senior leaders should continue this work to help teachers develop their skills in moderation further.
- Staff have designed a curriculum in the ERB that provides children with breadth, challenge and application in their learning. Teachers plan learning that supports children to develop their

skills as they move through the school. They plan across all curricular areas termly. Daily plans detail clearly what children are learning each day. Lessons support children to build progressively on what they can already do. Teachers track and monitor children's progress effectively. They use targets captured in children's individualised education programmes very effectively to evaluate children's progress in their learning. Teachers' robust processes for assessment provide them with accurate data on each child's progress. Teachers use this evidence well to plan learning, which provides each child with appropriate levels of challenge. Teachers should continue to develop their approaches to tracking and monitoring children's progress. They need to develop these approaches further to take better account of the changing cohort of children attending the ERB.

## **QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement**

### **Attainment in literacy and numeracy**

- Children who attend the ERB follow a highly personalised curriculum. All children require significant support to achieve Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels. From observations of learning and reviewing children's work overall, all children are making good progress from their prior levels of attainment.
- In literacy and communication, all children communicate well with staff using their preferred mode of communication. At pre-early level, children express themselves through gestures and vocalisations. At early and first levels, a few children speak well about topics of interest. A few children at first level present to their whole class. Most children listen well to staff and their peers and respond to questions and prompts. At pre-early and early levels, children are developing their mark-making skills using a range of resources. They are developing their abilities well to write letters and numbers. At first level, most children write simple sentences and stories. Taking account of their additional support needs, almost all children at all levels read information in pictorial form. At early level, most read simple words and texts. They use strategies well to decode unknown words. Teachers should continue to develop children's skills in all aspects of literacy and communication.
- In numeracy and mathematics, most children at pre-early and early levels develop their understanding of numbers well. At pre-early level, most children say single-digit numbers in sequence. At first level, most children perform single digit operations, including multiplication and division, using concrete materials well. At early level, almost all children understand daily routines. They tell the time on an analogue clock face using o'clock and half past. At first level, a few children describe direction using compass points. They use grid references to identify points on a simple grid. At early level, most children sort items by colour or shape. All children would benefit from increased opportunities to develop their skills in identifying and describing two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects.
- All children in the ERB are members of the pupil council or serve on one of the pupil committees. For example, a few children are literacy champions. This is helping them to develop their skills well in representing the interests of their peers in the ERB. For example, children are developing their confidence when visiting new and unfamiliar settings. Children's wider achievements, such as taking part in health week, are celebrated at school assemblies and through whole school awards. Children are proud of their achievements. Parents share children's achievements from home through a shared digital platform. Children enjoy sharing these experiences with staff.

- Most children in the ERB spend time learning alongside their mainstream peers each week. This includes them attending mainstream classes or children from mainstream classes joining them in their classes in the ERB. Children from the ERB enjoy opportunities to learn alongside children from mainstream classes. This is helping them to develop their social skills well and to feel fully included in the life of the school. Teachers should continue to monitor the impact of these activities to ensure children develop their skills further.
- The school has used PEF to purchase or provide a range of appropriate supports to help children in the ERB. For example, the school ensures that no child loses out on any trips or events as a result of cost to their family. The family support worker works well with families of children who struggle to attend school. Initial evidence shows that this is helping a few children to improve their attendance. Senior leaders should continue to monitor the impact of PEF on improving the attainment of those children with greatest need.

## Other relevant evidence

- The school has achieved silver reading school status. A literacy committee has helped to develop the library area which has included selecting new books. Children have created their own audio recordings of favourite books, which are enjoyed by the other children through the use of bar-matrix codes. The library has a range of fiction and non-fiction books. Scottish dialect books are available. The library would benefit from a greater range of materials promoting diversity.
- There is a progressive programme of learning in French from P1 to P7. In P5-7, children are beginning to learn Spanish. Children learn their language skills in discrete lessons, then apply these throughout the week in other areas of the curriculum.
- Children in all classes receive regular religious education linked to CfE experiences and outcomes for religious education in Roman Catholic schools and the school follows national guidelines for religious observance. Children learn about other faiths well through a progressive learning pathway.
- The Parent Council are consulted and make suggestions on all aspects of school life. They are particularly involved in reducing the cost of the school day. They help to determine how PEF is spent and try to canvas ideas and support from all parents.

## 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.