Summarised inspection findings

Birkhill Primary School

Angus Council

7 March 2023

Key contextual information

Birkhill Primary School is situated in the village of Birkhill in Angus Council. The leadership team consists of the headteacher, two part-time depute headteachers and two part-time principal teachers. The headteacher has been in post for six years. At the time of inspection, the school roll was 236 children arranged across 10 classes. During session 2021/22, the school experienced significant levels of staff and children's absence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's attendance rate is now in line with the national average. In September 2022, almost all children lived within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones 8 to 10.

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, staff and parents were fully involved in creating and refreshing the school's vision, values and aims. The school's motto is 'because we care' and staff and children show this well in their interactions with each other. The headteacher is enthusiastic and hardworking at embedding this motto across the school. As a result, there is a calm, purposeful and happy ethos across all classes. Children are exceptionally well behaved and respond well in lessons.

■ The highly-effective headteacher provides clear leadership and direction across the school and nursery. The headteacher and the extended leadership team support staff well. They set high educational standards and are ambitious for children to achieve success. All stakeholders respect them as a senior leadership team. As a result, they have created a school where all children make good progress and attain well within a nurturing, calm ethos.

■ The headteacher surveys the opinions of staff, parents, and children well to identify areas for improvement. The headteacher and staff are proactive in looking outwards and making positive links with other schools to ensure they have the highest expectations. Staff have a positive attitude to school improvement and feel fully involved in change. They willingly take on opportunities available to lead on school improvement activity. The leadership team take responsibility for areas of school improvement to develop with groups of staff. This is ensuring that the pace of change is fast moving and appropriate.

■ Staff have been successful in improving the approach to the teaching of reading and writing. They have worked well with cluster schools to produce their own set of expectations for reading and writing (rubrics) to ensure appropriate progression in learning. They use these rubrics well to assess children's progress. As a result, assessment of children's learning is accurate and supported well by clear individual folders of evidence. The depute headteacher has led staff well in work to enhance children's learning. Staff have improved the quality of their feedback to children which has helped them become more confident in their ability to talk about their learning. Staff are currently working together to enhance children's skills in listening and talking. The leadership team organise effective professional learning which is stored online for

staff to revisit as they require. The commitment of staff to professional learning and effective leadership of change is resulting in sustained high attainment across the school.

■ The headteacher has worked with staff, parents, and children to create a clear improvement plan to help support the pace of change. They share successfully how they plan to improve the school with parents and children. Senior leaders and staff gather evidence of how school improvement activities affect children's attainment. The headteacher includes all staff and children in the evaluation of school improvement activity.

■ Senior leaders and staff have a very good understanding of the varying needs of different cohorts of children. Together, they use this knowledge well to inform school improvement and interventions to support children. The leadership team have developed a very effective and robust way to track and monitor children's attainment across the school. Staff carefully track and monitor the attainment of children who are care experienced and those with additional support needs. Staff make effective use of additional funding from the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) to support identified children. The headteacher and staff are aware of the need to review how they support children in numeracy and mathematics to meet their needs within their own class.

■ Staff have re-established opportunities for children to develop their leadership skills and support decision making across the school. The Learning Council seeks the views of children and feeds this back to staff to help improve the school. The Junior Road Safety group and the Eco Committee identify priorities within these areas that children think need improved.

■ The headteacher and leadership team monitors the work of the school very effectively. They have created an improvement calendar which outlines the range of approaches used to evaluate the quality and impact of children's learning experiences. This includes sampling the work of children, visiting classes to observe children's experiences and peer observations. In addition, they have termly discussions with teachers regarding children's attainment, progress and achievements. As a result, the quality of learning and teaching across the school is very good in almost all classes. The headteacher works with local headteachers to enhance quality assurance across the school by inviting challenging discussions from colleagues. As a result, the headteacher has a very good understanding of the needs of her school and the impact of improvements.

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 create a very positive and nurturing learning environment for all children within Birkhill Primary School. The school has a warm, welcoming ethos underpinned by strong relationships between all staff and children. All staff demonstrate well the school's vision, values and mission statement, 'because we care' in their daily interactions with children. All children are polite, well-mannered and proudly welcome visitors to their school. Children are supportive of each other.

- Almost all children are well behaved and engage willingly in learning, both in class and outdoors. Staff work well with children on how to help them understand their learning. They are improving how they provide feedback to learners to improve attainment. As a result, children are confident in talking about their learning and taking responsibility for improving their work. Children enjoy sharing their work with parents through their online journals and their school experiences through the 'Birkie Bulletin' digital broadcast. They select examples of work they are proud of and share their work in a variety of formats. Over time, this helps parents to understand more fully how their children are making progress.

- Overall, the quality of teaching in most classes is very good. There are examples of strong practice in a few classes that would be worth sharing across the school. In almost all lessons, children are motivated and engaged in their learning. Teachers plan learning activities well to ensure that children have a balance of working independently and in small groups. Most teachers use questioning effectively to extend the children's learning and check for understanding. All teachers shared the purpose of lessons and support children to understand how to be successful in their learning. In a few classes, teachers encourage children to work together to identify how they will know if they have been successful in their learning. All teachers use digital technology effectively to deliver learning. Most children show skill in using digital technology in their learning. For example, children were able to scan codes to help them be independent in their learning and use online tools to survey and record each others opinions. Older children are beginning to use code. The school has been successful in achieving the Digital Schools Award in 2019.

- Staff have created effective rubrics to support learning, teaching and assessment in reading and writing. These are clear frameworks that divide up learning into meaningful blocks of learning. These are written in child friendly language which allows children to use these to assess their own progress. Staff use these well in lessons and children speak confidently regarding how these support them in their learning. These rubrics have ensured that assessment is accurate and well developed across the school. Staff are continuing to develop these rubrics in other curricular areas.

- At the early level, teachers have a shared understanding of learning through play and the role of the adult in supporting interactions and children's experiences. They make very good use of

the space available to provide learning through play. There is a good balance between free-flow and adult-directed play. At the early level children are attaining well in the organised, stimulating play environment. The children enjoy 'Mix Up Mondays', where children across nursery and P1 engage in play experiences together. This is very effective in supporting the transition process.

■ Teachers use long-term planning which is linked clearly to the experiences and outcomes for all areas of the curriculum. These termly planners are supplemented by more in-depth short-term planning of learning and teaching. Staff share termly overviews of the curriculum with parents who use this information well to support their child's learning at home. Teachers create regular opportunities for differentiation and choice in planned learning activities. Staff are aware of the need to revisit how children receive support in numeracy and mathematics within their class. In doing this they should improve approaches to meeting children's learning needs within age-appropriate peer groups, particularly in numeracy.

■ Teachers plan effective ongoing assessment of children's learning using the benchmarks and their own frameworks. In addition, they carry out formal assessment of children's work to decide the next steps and targets for individuals and for the class. Staff engage regularly in moderation of teachers' assessment across the school and cluster. Staff have recently undertaken refresh training on moderating the standard to ensure they make accurate judgements on achievement of a level. Teachers gather a range of evidence of children's work in individual assessment folios. These are well organised and are a useful tool to evidence progress over time.

■ Staff plan effectively for children who find learning challenging. They work with staff, parents and children to set clear short and long-term targets for children's learning. They review these targets regularly to ensure these are supporting children to make very good progress. Staff assess children well to identify individual specific needs in order to target support more effectively. For example, they use a wide range of assessments such as a dyslexic screening tool. They provide children with a range of interventions in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. They also offer a range of activities to support learning such as Forest schools, art therapy and a lego club to meet children's wide range of needs. Pupil support assistants work very effectively in the class or in small groups with children who need extra support or challenge.

■ The headteacher has termly planning, tracking and assessment meetings with teachers. At these meetings staff review individual children's progress and identify those exceeding expectations or those in need of support. From this, staff identify appropriate interventions and challenge for individuals. The headteacher and staff maintain detailed records of children's progress and attainment over time, gathering information from a range of assessment evidence. The headteacher`s thorough and careful tracking of children's progress and wellbeing needs is helping staff raise attainment. Staff also gather information about the individual progress of children in different cohorts to ensure all their needs are being met.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

■ Teachers have developed progression pathways across all curricular areas based on the experiences and outcomes, and design principles of Curriculum for Excellence. They use these consistently to plan learning and teaching. These progression pathways are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of children requiring additional support. Staff use curriculum planners to outline clearly learning experiences and the approach to assessment for all curricular areas.

■ Staff are now working with a wide range of partnerships and community links following the end of COVID-19 mitigations. These ensure that children receive rich learning experiences across a range of curricular areas and support their development of skills for learning, life and work. For example, staff have developed a structured outdoor learning plan in partnership with the local ranger service. Children enjoy having regular access to the outdoor classroom and the wildlife garden. Older children invite the local community to Dronley Delights Community Café each year to raise funds for future school excursions.

■ Children benefit from two hours of high-quality physical education (PE) each week which they experience both outdoors and indoors.

■ Children use digital technologies across learning, for example, to undertake research and to develop presentation skills. All children learn French. Children in P5–P7 are beginning to experience Spanish. Teachers now need to ensure that modern languages are taught more frequently to ensure children build on their prior learning effectively as they move through the school.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

■ Following the end of COVID-19 mitigations, staff are working well to re-establish all the activities within school that families enjoy and to support family learning. Parents have been in school to celebrate events such as Dronley Delights Community Café, Carols in the Garden, and reading events. These events are helping parents to learn more about children's experiences at school. A minority of parents would welcome more opportunities to participate in activities in school with their children.

■ Staff have surveyed parents to seek their views on parental involvement in school. Parents and staff are working together to plan ways for parents to be meaningfully involved and engaged in their child's learning.

■ A successful school swimming club, Birkhill and Muirhead Minnows, is run solely by parents. This has ensured that almost all P3–P7 children can swim unaided.

■ Teachers share curriculum newsletters with parents at the start of each term. They include information about what children will be learning and how parents can support learning at home. The headteacher shares information about school life and events through a detailed termly electronic newsletter.

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

■ The headteacher and staff prioritise the wellbeing of children and their families. They ensure wellbeing sits at the heart of the school's work. Across the school, all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). Children at Birkhill Primary School learn in a nurturing and caring environment. Children enjoy positive relationships with staff and their peers. They interact well with each other, staff and visitors to the school. Staff make very effective use of restorative approaches to help children manage disagreements when they arise. Almost all children believe the school helps them to understand and respect other people. They feel safe and listened to and have an adult that they can talk to if they are feeling worried.

■ All staff support all children very well through a positive relationships approach which has been developed with parents and children. They use consistent phrases to remind children of expectations linked to behaviour. Teachers are supporting children to increase their vocabulary linked to feelings and emotions. As a result, children are becoming increasingly skilled at expressing themselves confidently and appropriately. Children are becoming more independent when selecting strategies to manage situations they may find challenging. As a result, children's behaviour across the school is exemplary with very strong relationships evident between adults and children and between children.

■ Staff have a robust process of engaging children with meaningful time to reflect on their wellbeing. This helps almost all children feel safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included in school. Children evaluate their wellbeing regularly throughout the year. Teachers and senior leaders review all responses to the wellbeing questions. This helps staff to understand better the wellbeing needs of individual children. Staff ensure children who have shown wellbeing concerns are supported fully with timely interventions.

■ Almost all children feel that staff support them to have a healthy lifestyle. They benefit from a broad health and wellbeing curriculum. As a result, they are developing skills and understanding in areas such as positive relationships, the importance of physical exercise and healthy eating. Children talk confidently about keeping themselves safe online and about protecting their personal information. They are very aware of risks, such as the harm caused by substance misuse. Almost all children benefit from being active through a range of additional physical activities, provided by school staff and parent volunteers. They show a clear understanding of how physical activity improves their wellbeing.

■ Staff employ a range of successful, targeted interventions to secure progress and improve attainment for children who have additional needs. They record and track children's needs effectively through individual plans and profiles. This ensures that children make very good progress towards their individual targets. Staff work well with other agencies, such as allied

health professionals and third-sector organisations, to ensure positive outcomes for children and their families. They have established very good partnerships with agencies to support children's mental health. Staff engage well in a range of professional learning to help them support children's needs. Recently, they have undertaken training in autism spectrum disorder and restorative practice. In doing this, they have developed a very good understanding of how to meet the specific needs of individuals. In addition, staff provide helpful information leaflets to parents on, for example, restorative approaches to behaviour. A few staff also provide parents with useful short videos to support homework.

- The headteacher has put in place effective approaches to monitoring attendance and punctuality. Staff know the children and families well and are sensitive to their needs. As a result, this allows staff to identify barriers to attendance quickly and to offer support when appropriate.

- As a result of annual training and guidance, all staff understand and apply the statutory requirements and codes of practice in relation to child protection. There is a shared understanding of what is expected and how this might affect children and families. They have robust systems in place to support child protection procedures and keep children safe.

- The local authority submitted self-evaluation 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. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff. The HNI also examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school health promotion duties as far as they relate to food and nutrition. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

- The school recognises diversity and challenges discrimination through its health and wellbeing programme, inclusive ethos, whole-school events and celebrations. The religious and moral education programme supports children to respect others' beliefs and values. Teachers plan learning opportunities that foster children's understanding of themselves as a global citizen. Staff are beginning to engage with Children's rights and related articles. They provide whole school assemblies to explore the key themes of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).Religious observance opportunities are provided through assemblies and close links with the local church.

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 in literacy and numeracy across the school is very good. A significant number of children exceed national expectations across all levels. Children with additional support needs are making very good progress towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English
■ Overall, attainment in literacy and English is very good. Almost all children are achieving expected levels of attainment in reading and listening and talking. Most children are achieving expected levels of attainment in writing.

Listening and talking
■ At early level, almost all children listen and respond well to others appropriately and follow instructions very well. Almost all children share their ideas enthusiastically and with confidence within small group and whole class discussions. At first level, almost all children communicate effectively, take turns, and contribute at appropriate times when engaging with others for a range of purposes. At second level, almost all children build on the contributions of others well. Staff have recently engaged in professional learning on how to raise attainment in listening and talking. As a result, children are confident in talking about the skills required for effective talking and listening appropriate to their stage.

Reading
■ At early level, almost all children recognise, say, and write individual and blended sounds. Almost all children use pictorial clues to retell familiar stories and predict what might happen next. They are enthusiastic about reading and storytelling. At first level, children read aloud with expression and fluency. They confidently share their favourite author and reasons for their preference. They know the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. At second level, children show great passion for reading and explain their preference for texts. They discuss the main ideas within a text with detail and answer a range of higher order questions. Older children talk about a range of roles in their reading group, identifying questions to ask others, finding new vocabulary or summarising text. Children make use of the local library van when it visits the village.

Writing
At early level, children write simple sentences using capital letters, full stops, and spaces between words. They have good pencil control and form most letters legibly. Children working towards the early level should be challenged to write more independently. At first level, children use relevant and interesting vocabulary to entertain the reader. They regularly write a range of genre and assess their progress against the writing framework to help them improve. At second level, children use paragraphs well across a range of genre. They use a range of

punctuation and conjunctions effectively in their writing. Children identify clearly what they need to do to improve their writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

Overall attainment in numeracy and mathematics
■ Overall attainment in numeracy and mathematics is very good.

Number, Money and Measure
■ Most children working towards the early level show particular strength in number. They are secure in their number bonds to 20 and are able to find doubles. Most children carry out mental addition and subtraction to 20. A significant number of children can add four numbers mentally to 20 and beyond. By the end of early level, children are confident in number, including using coins in real life contexts. They can share resources equally amongst two, four and eight people. Children who have achieved first level name the place value of three-digit numbers and add on and subtract from these accurately. They confidently multiply numbers by 10 or 100. They are confident in adding money to £1 and calculate change of simple amounts. They read and recognise both analogue and digital times. They are confident in finding metres and centimetres. They need to become more confident and fluent in their times tables. Children working towards the second level confidently round numbers to the nearest 1,000 and convert simple fractions into decimals and percentages. They are skilled in money calculations and understand the advantages and disadvantages of credit and debit cards. They are very confident in all times tables and use these to make swift calculations. Across the school children are able to carry out mental calculations appropriate to their stage. Children apply their learning in real life contexts.

Shape, position and movement
■ At the end of early level, children confidently name familiar two-dimensional shapes. They describe relative positions of objects and give appropriate directions to move from one place to another. Children who have achieved first level, name common three-dimensional objects and explain their properties using appropriate mathematical language. Children working towards second level, calculate the perimeter and area of shapes accurately. They have a good understanding of circumference and radius of a circle. They can name types of angles, including supplementary and complementary angles.

Information Handling
■ At the end of early level, children confidently match and sort unfamiliar objects. Children who have achieved first level can explain how they would organise and carry out a simple survey. Overall, children at first and second level lack an understanding of graphs. Older children have a good understanding of probability and chance.

Overall quality of learners' achievements
■ Children across the school take part in a range of leadership groups. They are developing leadership and communication skills and the ability to work effectively in a group to achieve set goals. For example, children develop leadership skills through the Learning Council, the Eco Committee and the Reading Council.

■ Staff recognise and celebrate children's achievements regularly in the 'Birkie Bulletin'. Staff have surveyed children's participation in out-of-school activities and skills in swimming and cycling. Staff and parents provide a range of extra-curricular opportunities within and at the end of the school day. Senior leaders identify and track the skills children are developing. This supports children to make links between their achievements and the skills they are developing.

Equity for all learners

■ The headteacher and staff have a good understanding of the needs of the community. They make good use of the allocated PEF funding to support targeted children. They ensure that there is no attainment gap due to socio-economic circumstances. The headteacher and staff provide a range of interventions to support children with additional needs or who need support to stay on track. They measure the impact of these interventions carefully to ensure that all children, and those with barriers to learning are making very good progress. The headteacher has a clear improving attainment plan which has been effective in raising and sustaining high attainment across the school.

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.