

# Summarised inspection findings

**Firth Primary School**

Orkney Islands Council

28 May 2024

## Key contextual information

Firth Primary School is situated near the village of Finstown within Orkney Islands Council.

The headteacher has been in post since November 2021. Prior to the headteacher's appointment there had been significant changes to the senior leadership team over several years. The headteacher has overall responsibility for Firth Nursery Class which takes children aged from two years to five years. She is also the headteacher for another local school and nursery. There is one full-time equivalent (FTE) principal teacher who is class committed for four and a half days per week.

The school roll is 79 children working across three multi-stage classes. There are four FTE teachers including the principal teacher and a support for learning teacher who works in the school for two days per week. The school has visiting specialist teachers for art, physical education (PE), music and musical instrument tuition. There are two pupil support assistants.

All children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation SIMD 5 to 7. There have been no exclusions in the last three 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

- All children in Firth Primary benefit from the warm supportive ethos and the positive, nurturing and mutually respectful relationships. Children show they are 'learning to be our best together' and are respectful and polite. They enjoy calm and purposeful learning experiences which enable them to be happy and engaged in their learning.
- Staff know children well and they have a firm understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context of the school. They link children's themed learning effectively to the local context and through partnership working. For example, children visit places of interest within the locality to develop their artistic and creative skills in printing, line drawing and in modelling with clay. This ensures children experience learning that is relevant, engaging and exciting.
- Almost all children are well-behaved in lessons, working together well during tasks and activities. Last session, teachers developed their learning environments to provide children with purposeful learning routines. On occasion, children forget to take turns during class discussions in their enthusiasm to share their answers and ideas. Teachers support and encourage children to listen to others' views with positive reinforcement. Most children are friendly and respectful in the playground. They have space to run around and play different games in the extensive school grounds. This means that children come in from breaks refreshed, energised and ready to learn.

- The local authority supports school staff with advice and guidance on promoting positive behaviour with policies and professional learning. The local authority has recently consulted headteachers on their updated exclusions policy. Staff choose from options to best suit their professional learning needs on supporting inclusion. For example, staff can choose training on de-escalation strategies and providing children with a secure learning environment.
- Staff are at the early stages of developing play-based learning to ensure children's play experiences extend their learning. Senior leaders and staff should continue to review approaches to play-based learning at early level and develop a vision for play. There would be benefit in staff working alongside colleagues in the Nursery Class, using the national guidance *Realising the Ambition*. This will help to ensure a shared understanding of play-based learning and high-quality interactions.
- All children have very worthwhile opportunities to lead their learning, participating in a range of relevant pupil voice groups. This helps children to make a meaningful contribution to the life and work of the school. Children worked successfully with staff to develop the school library and create a rich literacy environment. Staff implement consistent strategies to engage children in reading for enjoyment. These approaches are successfully leading to children's greater motivation and enjoyment in reading across the school and improving their literacy skills.
- The headteacher engages in self-evaluation activities with children, staff and families to ensure high aspirations and a better understanding of standards for achieving quality learning. She has developed an effective quality assurance calendar, detailing approaches to evaluating and monitoring the quality of learning and teaching. Staff participate in professional learning opportunities and practitioner enquiries using educational research to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Their work has led to new approaches that improve children's confidence, accuracy and skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Teachers underpin their approaches to learning and teaching with the school values of honesty, responsibility, respect, kindness and friendship. All staff ensure the purpose of learning is clear and discuss with children how they will be successful in their learning. Most staff share clear explanations and instructions with children and encourage discussion about their learning tasks. Most teachers use questions to check for understanding. They should use a wider range of questions to extend learning and develop children's higher order thinking skills.
- All teachers use interactive learning walls to help children be clear about the purpose and content of their learning. This helps children to learn independently. Children add their observations and reflections to learning walls which helps them to talk more confidently about their learning. Teachers plan learning to enable children to work as a whole class, in pairs or groups and support each other in their learning. Teachers plan learning that is set at different levels of difficulty to ensure learning is well-matched to children's needs and abilities. Teachers provide children with a range of useful feedback, particularly in writing, which is helping children to achieve their targets successfully.
- Teachers plan and enrich children's learning by using a range of digital platforms to support independent learning in literacy and numeracy. Children who have barriers to learning use digital devices to enable them to successfully access learning. Teachers share children's progress, learning and achievements with parents using digital sharing platforms. This helps parents to understand their child's learning and achievement journey.
- Class teachers measure children's progress regularly in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing using a range of assessment tools. Teachers use their assessment information well to inform their short-term and long-term planning of learning. Teachers are at the early stages

of planning for high quality assessments. They should implement their well-considered plans to take this work forward. This will help them to assess children's application of skills in different contexts. The headteacher should support teachers with clear operational guidance on all assessment processes. This will support a more cohesive and robust approach across the school.

- Teachers participate in useful moderation of assessment in writing with their colleagues and a few staff have participated in moderation out with the school. This is helping them become more confident in making judgements about children's attainment levels. The headteacher and staff identify that further engagement in moderation activities will ensure a shared understanding of children's attainment and national standards.
- Teachers plan children's learning over different timescales using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). They use progression pathways for all curricular areas. Teachers create detailed weekly planners which outline key learning and are responsive to children's progress from the previous week. This helps children to make effective progress in their learning. Teachers plan carefully for children who require additional support with their learning by setting specific and measurable targets which they evaluate on a termly basis. Teachers plan learning that links different areas of the curriculum using a five-year overview. This takes effective account of multi-stage composite classes ensuring children receive breadth of learning over all curricular areas as they move through the school.
- Teachers meet with the headteacher four times a year to discuss children's progress and attainment. They plan helpful universal and targeted interventions within literacy and numeracy to address gaps in children's learning and remove barriers to learning. The headteacher should continue to focus on the national Benchmarks during these meetings, supporting teachers to have confidence in their professional judgements. The headteacher recognises the need to focus carefully on the progress and attainment of children who experience particular challenge or those impacted by socio-economic factors. This will help to ensure that Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) is accelerating the progress of identified children.

## 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 that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

### 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

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

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

#### Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- There are small numbers of children at each stage. Therefore, children's levels of attainment are expressed as overall statements rather than for specific CfE levels.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics is good. Most children achieve expected levels of attainment. A few children exceed expected levels of attainment.
- Overall, the majority of children who require additional support with their learning make good progress towards identified targets.

#### Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make good progress in literacy and English.

#### Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children are highly articulate for their age and stage. They use a wide range of vocabulary. Most younger children follow instructions well and respond appropriately to others. Most children at the middle stages communicate audibly and clearly. A few children require support to take turns during group discussions. Most older children communicate effectively with others during presentations. They would benefit from more opportunities to give presentations to a wide range of audiences.

#### Reading

- All children make effective use of the new school library. Led well by the reading ambassadors, children have increased interest and enthusiasm for books. This is helping them to learn about different authors, genres and increasing their vocabulary. Recently the school won a national award for reading. Children and staff are immensely proud of this award.
- Most younger children are developing their reading skills well through supportive approaches teachers use to help them identify letter sounds and decode words. Staff should continue to support children to read aloud and discuss their books. Most children at the middle stages read aloud fluently answering literal and inferential questions to demonstrate their understanding of texts. They are less clear about the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. Most older children explain the difference between fact and opinion clearly. They have a firm understanding of the features of non-fiction texts. They would benefit from deeper study of authors to explore and identify features of the writers' style.

## **Writing**

- Across the school, teachers use recently introduced approaches that are increasing children's engagement in writing and developing their vocabulary well.
- Most younger children copy sentences and are beginning to write their own sentences independently. Staff should ensure children have opportunities to revise letter, word and sentence formation. Most children at the middle and upper stages write across a range of fiction and non-fiction genres. They take notes successfully and use them to create non-fiction texts and reports. Most older children understand clearly how to structure non-fiction texts. They use a wide range of punctuation in their writing. Across the middle and upper stages, teachers should remind children to write legibly applying the high standards in their handwriting jotters across all written work.

## **Numeracy and mathematics**

- Across the school, most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

## **Number, money and measure**

- Most younger children order and count numbers enthusiastically, they are eager to demonstrate counting to 50 and beyond. They use the language of measure, comparing lengths using long, longer, longest but are less confident discussing non-standard units of measure. Most children at the middle stages estimate the length of objects and check this using instruments of measure. They would benefit from regular revision of their times tables to support mental calculations. Most children at the middle and upper stages demonstrate their understanding of the four number processes well. Most older children have a clear understanding of budgeting. They are not yet confident in converting fractions to decimals and percentages.

## **Shape, position and movement**

- Most younger children identify confidently a range of two-dimensional shapes. They are beginning to name three-dimensional objects. At the middle stages, most children identify a range of three-dimensional objects and describe their properties accurately. They are less confident in identifying right angles. Most older children have a firm understanding of shape and angles.

## **Information handling**

- Most younger children follow and create patterns according to criteria such as shape or colour. At the middle stages, most children gather and sort information for a range of purposes and display these in bar graphs. They would benefit from revision of the features of bar graphs. Older children use digital technology successfully to gather, sort and display information in a range of graphs and charts such as line graphs and pie charts.

## **Attainment over time**

- Overall, children's attainment is high over time. The headteacher has a clear strategy to raise attainment focusing rightly on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills. Children apply their literacy and numeracy skills very well across the curriculum.
- Teachers track children's progress in literacy and numeracy. They implement effective universal and targeted interventions quickly and evaluate them regularly. Teachers should continue to ensure they measure the 'added value' of interventions on children's attainment. This will support them to identify the interventions that make the biggest difference for children.
- Teachers are developing their understanding of national standards through moderation activities. They use a range of assessments to support their professional judgements about

children's attainment. Teachers should focus more on using the national Benchmarks to measure children's progress and attainment.

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

- All children have many worthwhile opportunities to develop their skills for learning, life and work in pupil leadership groups. Children have real ownership of these groups and proudly display their ideas and actions throughout the school. These groups support children to develop a wide range of skills, including teamwork, organisational skills and creativity. Importantly, children's work in these groups develops their literacy and numeracy skills and their understanding of health and wellbeing. As a next step, staff should support children to recognise and articulate the range of skills they are developing.
- Children's achievements both in and out of school are shared and celebrated in wall displays, on online platforms and during assemblies. Staff should track children's achievements to ensure that no child is at risk of missing out.
- Children participate in various after school sporting clubs and all children from P4 to P7 have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. These opportunities develop children's musical and sporting skills well.
- Children are developing a strong understanding of sustainability through working with a range of partners. Children contribute very effectively to their school community and are responsible citizens.

### **Equity for all learners**

- The headteacher uses PEF to provide a range of universal and targeted interventions. These interventions are helping identified children to make progress in their learning. The headteacher recognises the need to ensure that these interventions are accelerating children's progress and closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- Children's attendance is above national levels. The headteacher tracks children's attendance carefully. She takes steps promptly to address situations when a child's attendance falls below national levels.



## Other relevant evidence

- The school has a very attractive library space with several breakout spaces to encourage children to read for enjoyment. School reading ambassadors have genuine ownership of the design and layout of these spaces. They are instrumental in supporting and encouraging other children to read. They organise reading books into fiction and non-fiction itemising books under many different genres. Reading ambassadors provide other children with ideas of things to do in the library. For example, they make helpful suggestions such as building a reading den or create a prop for a favourite book. The reading ambassadors also make reference to children's rights and how they link to reading. Overall, this approach is helping to engage children in reading and to develop their literacy skills well. The school has recently received a national award for their approaches to engaging children in reading.
- Children receive two hours of high-quality physical education every week.
- The headteacher consults the Parent Council on the use of PEF.
- Children receive education in religious and moral education through planned learning opportunities to learn about different religious beliefs. Children participate in religious services with the local church.
- 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. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. Several areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the school meals provider.

## 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.