

Summarised inspection findings

St Mary's Primary School and Early Learning and Childcare

West Dunbartonshire Council

4 March 2025

Key contextual information

St Mary's Primary School is a denominational school serving the areas of Duntocher and Hardgate in Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire. At the time of inspection there were 278 children across 12 primary classes. The leadership team comprises a headteacher, two deputy headteachers and a principal teacher. At the time of the inspection, approximately 17% of children lived in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation data zones 1 and 2.

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

- Led very effectively by the headteacher, staff have developed an aspirational ethos within a nurturing culture. Senior leaders model high expectations, underpinned by the Gospel values very well. This motivates staff and children to achieve success and work very well together in a range of contexts. Across the school, children enjoy learning and playing together, striving to 'be better than their best'.
- In all classes, there are very positive interactions between children and adults and between children. Children are confident, respectful and friendly. Almost all children listen attentively to adults and their peers during class lessons. Across the school, almost all children engage very well in their learning. They demonstrate a very strong understanding of the school values and children's rights.
- Children contribute effectively to the life of the school through a range of leadership roles. For example, children in the Young Leaders of Learning group used 'How Good is OUR school' as a framework to share ideas to improve aspects of teaching and learning. At second level, children have played an active role in leading and shaping change in their learning environments. For example, their views influenced the introduction of more flexible seating arrangements in older children's classes and the development of open plan communal learning areas. This has led to more inclusive and engaging spaces for collaboration and supported opportunities for independent learning.
- In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose of lessons well with children. In almost all lessons, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. In most lessons, teachers employ a range of effective teaching approaches and organise learning which meets the needs of all children. This includes good use of flexible learning environments to support and challenge children effectively. In most lessons, teachers make effective use of questioning to check children's understanding. Teachers have correctly identified improving feedback as an area for further development.
- In most lessons, the pace of learning is appropriate, with evidence of children enjoying opportunities for choice through learning which links across different curriculum areas. There is

potential to continue to build on good practice in this area to provide more opportunities for personalisation in what children learn. In almost all lessons, teachers make clear links to skills for future learning, life and work. As a result, children accurately identify the skills they are developing linked to the global competencies of critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, citizenship and character. They benefit from opportunities to apply and develop skills across a range of learning activities in meaningful contexts.

- At P1 and P2, there is a strong understanding of learning through play. Teachers plan high-quality and engaging learning collaboratively, reflecting on children's prior learning. Teachers and support staff skilfully interact with children, helping them to make appropriate progress in their learning through play. An example of this is the progression of mathematical and problem-solving skills through block play. This is fostering children's curiosity, problem-solving, and creativity very well.
- In most classes, children have regular opportunities to take their learning outdoors. This approach is helping to extend and deepen children's learning well. As planned, senior leaders and staff should continue to develop opportunities for progressive outdoor learning experiences for all children.
- In most classes, teachers use a range of digital resources such as video clips, interactive whiteboards and tablets effectively to enhance learning and teaching. Matrix barcodes are displayed throughout the school to share learning with children and visitors. Children confidently use digital technologies and make good use of online platforms to support and enhance their learning. They share their learning with each other through digital learning tools and to record aspects of their learning.
- Almost all teachers use agreed assessment strategies consistently well. They make effective and regular use of formative assessment strategies to track children's progress at key points during lessons. Senior leaders and teachers have developed highly effective approaches to assessment that measure progress across a breadth of learning and when applying learning in unfamiliar contexts. Teachers have clear expectations of the range of evidence they will gather to support them to track children's progress and plan next steps. This ensures that teachers use a wide range of evidence to track progress and confirm assessment judgements in literacy and numeracy.
- Teachers' activities to understand national standards with their stage partners and teachers in their associated cluster schools are a strength. Senior leaders prioritise time for teachers to participate in these activities. This is resulting in more reliable judgements of attainment in areas such as numeracy and reading.
- Teachers use a whole school planning tool to plan short-, medium- and long-term targets for all children. Senior leaders monitor planning robustly. Professional dialogue between senior leaders and teachers ensures that plans are comprehensive and reflect the needs of learners. All staff plan learning effectively and collaboratively across levels and with stage partners, this ensures progression in skills development.
- Senior leaders and teachers use robust and highly effective tracking and monitoring systems to track progress of all children. This includes children who are impacted by poverty and those with barriers to learning. Senior leaders meet with class teachers termly to discuss children's progress in literacy and numeracy and across the session track children's progress in learning across the curriculum. Together, they review the range of data gathered to identify children

who are not making expected progress and agree appropriate interventions and supports. This approach is helping to ensure children make very good progress in their learning.

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

very good

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Overall, attainment across the school is very good. Almost all children at early level, and most children at first and second level are achieving expected levels in literacy and numeracy. A few children at every level are working beyond expected levels of attainment. Children who require additional support with their learning make appropriate progress towards individual learning targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, almost all children are making very good progress in listening and talking. Most children are making very good progress in reading and writing.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, almost all children speak with confidence. Children have very good opportunities to collaborate. They apply their talking and listening skills in a wide range of motivating contexts.
- Almost all children at early level follow instructions and communicate effectively in their learning, social activities and through play. At first level, most children confidently share their views and opinions. A few require support to take turns during conversations with each other. They would benefit from developing their understanding of the difference between fact and opinion. Almost all children working towards second level, show respect for the views of others and participate successfully in group discussions. They share information, participate in topical issues and can discuss a range of texts.

Reading

- At early level, almost all children are beginning to recognise initial sounds, blend sounds and develop their sight vocabulary. Almost all children answer questions well about the books they have read. At first level, most children read with increasing fluency and explain their preference for different types of text. Almost all children at first and second level enjoy reading regularly in class and at home. At second level, almost all read aloud with fluency and expression. They can comment on the main features of the books they are reading and answer literal and evaluative questions. They are less confident answering inferential questions.

Writing

- Children at early level benefit from regular opportunities to show their early writing skills during play experiences. They use their phonics knowledge to add text to drawings. Children who have achieved early level are able to write sentences with capital letters and full stops and illustrate the sequence of a story. Most children at first level write imaginative stories using a range of vocabulary to engage the reader. At second level, most children write imaginatively

using interesting vocabulary and varied sentence length to make their writing more engaging. Across all levels, teachers should continue to provide opportunities for children to create texts for different purposes.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, almost all children at early level and most children at first and second level are making very good progress in numeracy and mathematics. As planned, children at first and second level should more regularly revisit taught mathematical concepts to help consolidate their learning.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, almost all children count on accurately from a given number. They are increasingly confident using numbers beyond 20 and developing their knowledge of money through play-based activities. At first level, most children confidently round numbers to the nearest 10 and 100. They have a very good understanding of place value and accurately compare the size of fractions. Most children working towards second level accurately read and record time. Most children add and subtract multiples of 100 and 1000 to and from whole numbers. They are less confident in calculating area and perimeter and making links between fractions, percentages and decimals.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, almost all children recognise and sort common two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects according to various criteria. At first level, most children understand the properties of right angles. They identify symmetry within shapes, pictures and patterns. At second level, most children working towards second level confidently discuss, describe, and classify angles using appropriate mathematical language. They are less confident describing the properties of three-dimensional shapes.

Information handling

- At early level, children use a simple graph to answer questions and use their knowledge of colour and size to match and sort items through play-based activities. At first level, most children use tally marks to record information accurately and use digital technology to create a range of graphs and charts. Most children working towards second level, analyse, interpret and draw conclusions accurately from a range of data.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders ensure class teachers have and use attainment data for individual and groups of children. Teachers use this data well to develop a strong understanding of children's progress. This is a key aspect of the school's raising attainment and improving learning strategy.
- Overall, attainment has remained high across the school over a period of years. There was a slight decrease in attainment in writing as a result of the impact of the period of school building closures during the pandemic. Senior leaders prioritised a focus on writing approaches. Attainment levels shortly afterwards returned to and in some cases exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The school consistently performs very well relative to schools with similar demographics.
- Attendance levels are above national and local authority averages. Senior leaders promote the importance of good attendance well and track absences and late coming rigorously. They follow local authority processes and take effective action to improve the attendance for a few children whose attendance is less than 90%.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Staff celebrate children's achievements at assemblies, through displays, online platforms and on social media. Staff record, monitor and track all children's achievements. This is helping to ensure opportunities are provided for children at risk of missing out, for example participating in activities and excursions.
- Children across the school take part enthusiastically in a wide range of leadership roles, for example as Young Leaders of Learning, in the global group and Laudato Si group, as reading ambassadors, sports leaders, junior road safety officers, digi gurus and mini vinnies. They articulate very well how these roles and other wider achievements help them to develop skills and shape improvements in learning across the school. Children are well placed now to profile and record the skills they are developing through these roles and other learning opportunities. This will support the children to continue to reflect on their own successes and the progression of their skills development.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders and staff have a very sound knowledge of the social and economic contexts of children and families, and the impact of financial pressures on families. They build strong relationships and partnerships across the community. This supports families with discretion and sensitivity to mitigate against barriers children face.
- Senior leaders use a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data to identify children in need of targeted support and to inform the rationale for Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) spending. PEF has been used to fund interventions to improve children's literacy; readiness to learn and family wellbeing. Senior leader set clear aims, targets and measures to evaluate the impact of each of the interventions. Evaluations show evidence of positive impact. Almost all children receiving individualised support or resources are more engaged in their learning and are making accelerated progress in writing, development of social skills and wellbeing.

Other relevant evidence

- Across the school, children have access to a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts in the school and class libraries. This is helping to support a strong culture of reading for enjoyment.
- The Parent Council is aware of the school plans to spend PEF allocation. Senior leaders should continue to develop approaches to consultation with stakeholders.
- The school provides children with two hours of high-quality physical education per week.
- All children learn Spanish progressively from P1 to P7. Children in P6 and P7 learn Gaelic.
- Children experience a progressive and faith-based pathway for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools.

Practice worth sharing more widely

Teachers have successfully implemented highly effective play pedagogy at P1 and P2. They make effective use of creative learning environments that strongly encourage children's curiosity and engagement in learning. Teachers and support staff skilfully interact with children, collaboratively plan and reflect on children's prior learning helping them to make very good progress in their learning.

Teachers have developed a deep understanding of play pedagogy through collaboration, research and evidence informed approaches. They participate in high-quality professional learning related to play and support each other in reflecting on their practice. They have created a learning environment influenced by national guidance which encompasses the totality of experiences, spaces, and interactions. This inspiring, flexible environment promotes children's curiosity, independence, collaboration, and confidence. Teachers engage in robust evaluation of this approach to ensure it offers sufficient challenge and progression for all children. Teachers frequently share practice with colleagues outwith the school and lead on professional learning for others.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

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|-------------------------|---------------|
| 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.