

Summarised inspection findings

Cuiken Primary School

Midlothian Council

29 April 2025

Key contextual information

Cuiken Primary School is a non-denominational school in Penicuik, Midlothian. The school comprises of a mainstream provision with 211 children on the school roll across nine classes. In addition, The Nest is a complex needs provision with 18 children across three classes. The school also has a nursery class which currently provides placements for 55 children during term time.

At the time of inspection, the headteacher had been in post for nine weeks. She is supported by a full-time deputy headteacher and two principal teachers. This session, 14% of children are entitled to free school meals. Across the mainstream and unit, 43% of children have an identified support need. A few children have English as an additional language (EAL). Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 3 to 6. A few children live in SIMD decile 2. A minority of children live in SIMD deciles 7 to 10.

There have been significant changes to the leadership team, staffing in the school and staffing in the nursery over the last five years. As a result of recent appointments, there has been a period of stability this term.

| 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment | satisfactory |
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| <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">■ learning and engagement■ quality of teaching■ effective use of assessment■ planning, tracking and monitoring | |

- In a very short space of time, the newly appointed headteacher has developed a clear understanding of the school context, strengths and areas for improvement. She worked collaboratively with staff to agree the approaches to learning and teaching that have had a positive effect on classroom practice. This whole staff shared focus on high-quality practice is helping to improve the consistency of children's experiences across the school.
- In classes, there is a positive ethos with a strong sense of community and belonging. Staff and children value being part of the 'Cuiken Family'. Through the nurturing and consistent approaches of staff, children are improving their ability to self-regulate their behaviour when they feel challenged. Most children feel that staff treat them fairly and that the school helps them to understand and respect other people. However, less than half the children feel that other children treat them fairly and with respect. As planned, staff need to continue to support a few children to improve their social and emotional skills. This should support them to manage their feelings and behaviour more effectively.
- All staff are engaging in professional learning to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. They are a supportive team, sharing their learning across the school. Senior leaders and staff recently worked together to develop a shared understanding of the features of high-quality learning and teaching. Together, they are focused on developing more consistent approaches to planning learning that takes greater account of what children can already do.

- All teachers consistently plan lessons, sharing the purpose clearly and teaching new concepts through whole class introductions. Teachers plan activities to help children practise new learning. They use plenaries effectively to review learning. Teachers plan regular opportunities for children to use digital technologies. This supports children to reinforce taught concepts in numeracy.
- All teachers interact positively with children through effective use of open-ended questions to explore children's understanding. This results in most children being motivated and engaged during class lessons. They listen carefully during initial lesson introductions. Most children work well in pairs and small groups and the majority can work independently through the range of tasks set by the teacher. However, children now need to be supported to sustain their concentration for extended periods of time. Although teachers have developed consistency in the way lessons are structured, they now need to improve the pace of learning for the majority of children. Too often tasks are not set at the correct level of difficulty. Children do not have enough opportunities to practise and apply key skills at their level and take greater responsibility for their learning.
- Teachers at early level are developing well children's play experiences. Interactions between children and staff are positive. Staff provide well-considered spaces that provide opportunities for children to be creative. Children make choices about where they want to learn. Teachers use opportunities for adult-led learning with small groups effectively to deepen children's thinking and understanding in literacy and numeracy. Moving forward, teachers need to ensure that child-led learning experiences provide appropriate challenge. This should support children to make better progress in their learning.
- Across the school most children benefit from teacher's helpful verbal feedback which relates well to the purposes of lessons. During focused learning in reading, teachers comment positively on children's fluency and understanding. In a few lessons, children provide helpful feedback to each other. Children enjoy and take account of peer feedback. Teachers include written comments to children about their learning. However, teachers need to continue to improve the consistency of written feedback. This should support children to understand more clearly their next steps in learning.
- Teachers use effectively recently introduced progression pathways in literacy and numeracy to plan over different timescales. These pathways provide well-considered approaches to differentiate learning and improve teachers' professional judgements. Teachers plan learning taking account of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. They plan periodic assessments appropriately at the end of blocks of learning and link assessments well to national Benchmarks. While these assessments contribute to information about children's progress, teachers are at the early stages of using ongoing assessments effectively. As a result of the limited reliability of assessment information, the pace of learning in classes is too slow and independent tasks do not always provide sufficient challenge. Senior leaders should continue to provide a high level of support to teachers to ensure that professional judgements are robust, reliable and take account of national standards. As a next step, teachers and senior leaders should engage further in moderation of assessment both across the school and with other schools in the local authority. This should continue to improve the reliability of attainment data and ensure more effective planning to meet children's needs. This should support teachers to help children to make improved progress.
- Staff are improving their approaches to support children with barriers to learning in literacy and numeracy. These improvements include earlier identification of needs and proportionate support. In addition, children who require help with learning, use digital technology very well to support them to complete daily tasks and showcase their learning.

- Staff use an established online tracking and monitoring system well. The headteacher has further developed this system to streamline valuable information about children's progress. This system includes teachers' professional judgments and periodic summative assessment information and highlights children's progress and predicted CfE levels from P1 to P7. Senior leaders hold termly data meetings with class teachers. They focus on children's learning and the evidence to support the professional judgements about children's progress and attainment. As a result of the recent focus on more reliable data, teachers are now planning learning and taking greater account of what children already know in literacy and numeracy. There is a need to continue to develop this approach to monitoring and tracking to ensure increased expectations of what children can do for all curricular areas.

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

satisfactory

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 numeracy is satisfactory. The majority of children at early, first and second levels achieve appropriate CfE levels. Across the school, a minority of children are capable of achieving even more. The majority of children who require additional support with their learning are making satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Most children are making satisfactory progress in reading. The majority of children are making satisfactory progress in listening and talking. The majority of children at early and second levels are making satisfactory progress in writing. Most children at first level are making good progress in writing.

Listening and talking

- At early level, the majority of children listen well to the adult for short bursts of time. They are improving their ability to listen to their peers and contribute appropriately to class discussions. Children now need to improve their listening skills and develop the skills associated with a good audience such as appropriate body language and eye contact. At first level, the majority of children confidently share their thoughts and ideas. They answer different types of questions and state the main idea of a given text. Children at first level do not listen effectively to the views and contributions of their peers to build upon others' opinions. At second level, most children listen well to their peers and offer relevant information appropriate to the class discussion. They recognise a few skills required to share information during class presentations. They would benefit from developing a wider range of techniques to engage the audience such as vocabulary, body language and use of tone.

Reading

- At early level, the majority of children use known sounds to read simple words. They are gaining confidence in sounding out five letter words with blends. They recognise a few common words to aid their independent reading. Children now need to develop confidence in reading simple words without sounding out every letter. At first level, most children read aloud with increasing fluency. They name their favourite authors and explain their preference. They are not as confident discussing the features of different genres or identifying strategies to help them read unfamiliar words. At second level, most children read aloud with improving expression. They discuss their favourite genre of texts and explain their reasons. Children discuss a range of reading skills and strategies they use when faced with an unfamiliar text. Children are not as confident when answering different types of questions and providing supportive detail from the text.

Writing

- At early level, the majority of children write a sentence using a capital letter, full stop and finger spaces. They use sounds and blends to write unknown words. At first level, most children write texts with improving technical accuracy. They are increasing their use of descriptive language to engage the reader. At second level, the majority of children write texts using appropriate punctuation. Children could use a wider range of punctuation and varied sentence length to engage the reader. Children have a sound understanding that figurative language makes creative texts more interesting but do not always incorporate these into their writing. Children at second level now need to write across the curriculum using the features of the genre they are writing in. Across the school, children need to write more regularly and at length across a wider range of contexts. They need to improve the presentation of their work in all curricular areas.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, most children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- At early level, most children confidently count on and back within 20. They recognise the value of a missing number on a number line and carry out simple subtraction within 10. Most children tell the time using o'clock on an analogue clock. At first level, most children add and subtract confidently two- and three-digit whole numbers. They read and order numbers to 1,000. They would benefit from more regular opportunities to practise mental calculations to improve speed and accuracy. Most children at second level understand the value of whole and decimal numbers. They read, order and write numbers to 1,000,000 accurately. The majority of children describe the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages and use this knowledge to solve simple calculations. Children at second level require more experience of solving more complex word problems.

Shape, position and movement

- At early level, most children recognise and name simple two-dimensional shapes. At first level, most children recognise a wide range of two-dimensional shapes and basic three-dimensional objects and describe their properties confidently. The majority of children use instruments to measure length in centimetres and millimetres. They need to improve their accuracy when estimating size. At second level, most children identify and name different types of triangles and explain their properties. They identify and describe angles accurately. The majority of children at second level understand and explain the concepts of area and perimeter. They need to improve how they use these skills in real-life contexts.

Information handling

- At early level, most children use tally marks to gather views using class surveys for real-life contexts. They need to develop their skills further in displaying collected data in a range of ways such as simple bar graphs and pictograms. Children at first level use tally marks to collect, organise and display information using appropriate types of graphs. Children at second level interpret pie charts and use these to display information accurately. They should develop their use and understanding of Venn and Carroll diagrams. Across the school, children need to develop further their skills in using digital technology to collect, organise and display different types of information.

Attainment over time

- Teachers are developing their understanding of national standards. They track children's attainment and achievement over time but recognise this is not yet sufficiently robust or reliable. The headteacher, in a very short space of time, has rightly identified the need to

strengthen assessment information. This should support teachers to measure more accurately the progress children make.

- Senior leaders monitor attendance on a fortnightly basis. They analyse well attendance data and intervene appropriately to support children and families who require support to attend school. Attendance is above the local and national average. Currently attendance is 96.6% which is a 2% increase from the same point last session. Attendance has increased steadily over the past three sessions. Most absence can be attributed to family holidays taken during term time. At the time of inspection, the headteacher confirmed there were no children experiencing part-time education.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children enjoy a wide range of activities and clubs in school and the local community. This helps children develop musical and sporting skills. Children participate successfully in local sporting tournaments such as hockey, football and cross country and are rightly proud of their success. Children develop their musical skills through strings and brass tuition and talk confidently of the skills they develop through participation in the Glee Club and national Glee Club competition. Children extend their understanding of outdoor learning through successful partnership with a local zoologist. They speak confidently of the nature and wildlife skills they develop as a result of this partnership.
- School staff celebrate and share children's success through online platforms, attractive school displays and during school assemblies. Teachers are beginning to track participation in activities outwith the school day to intervene to support children who may be missing out. Moving forward, teachers and senior leaders should support children to recognise and understand the skills they are acquiring through participation in clubs and activities.
- The headteacher has recognised and responded promptly to the lack of leadership opportunities for children. She is reintroducing committees and pupil voice groups to support children to apply their skills to a wider range of contexts as well as influencing school improvement. Children are enthusiastic about these changes and talk about the skills they can apply to these new roles.

Equity for all learners

- Senior leaders have a sound understanding of the social and economic context of the school community. They know children and their families well and support families sensitively who may require assistance. The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) appropriately to provide flexible support to children and families, including a breakfast club free to all children. PEF is helping to support outdoor learning, providing a broader range of skills and experiences for all children. Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to track the impact of these interventions more accurately to ensure they are helping to close the poverty related attainment gap.
- Staff work well with parents and local organisations to reduce the cost of the school day including providing access to pre-loved school uniform. Working with the Parent Partnership, staff have agreed shared funding for school trips and events to make the cost of events more manageable for families. School staff use their knowledge of children and families sensitively to ensure that all children have equal access to events and opportunities, including attendance at residential experiences.

Context

The Nest, based in the school, provides additional support for 18 children from P1 to P6, split across three classes. The additional support needs of children attending the unit has changed since last session. Children now present with more severe and complex additional support needs. The unit came under the management of the school in August 2024. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the unit. The principal teacher with responsibility for the unit was appointed in August 2024. Ten children who attend the unit spend some time each week learning in mainstream classes at Cuiken Primary School or in their home school.

QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- All staff develop positive relationships with children attending the unit. This helps most children to settle in class each day. Teachers and learning assistants are developing their knowledge of each child's additional support needs. This is helping them to understand better the challenges each child faces in accessing their learning. When supported appropriately, most children engage in their learning. In too many lessons children are not engaged in meaningful learning. Teachers need to continue to develop their understanding of how to deliver learning tasks which are appropriately challenging, enjoyable and meet children's needs better.
- The Nest is currently in a period of transition with recent changes in staffing, management and children's additional support needs. As such, senior leaders recognise a need to review the school's vision for The Nest. This is an important piece of work, which will help staff have a clearer understanding of the purpose of learning at the unit.
- Teachers use spaces well within classrooms and the school building to provide contexts for children's learning. These are linked mostly to helping children remain calm and settled in class. Teachers should now consider how they can develop these spaces further to provide a wider range of more stimulating contexts for learning. The school currently works with a partner who is supporting teachers to develop their skills in outdoor learning. Early indications show that children engage well in these activities. Teachers are beginning to develop their skills in delivering outdoor learning, for example, taking children to the woodland near the school. Teachers should continue to be supported to develop their understanding of how to enrich children's learning through the use of a wide range of contexts, including the outdoors.
- Staff are developing their use of a range of ways to support children's communication skills. They are building their skills in using signing when explaining tasks. They use visual cues appropriately, such as visual timetables, to help children understand what they will be doing each day. Teachers are building their skills in using augmentative and alternative technologies to support children's communication. Teachers use whiteboards to display videos to support children's engagement in their learning. A few children use tablets to take photographs. Teachers need to develop further how they use technologies to support children's learning and communication.
- Teachers' use of questioning is limited to engaging children in an activity, or to make a choice. They need to develop how they use questioning to promote children's curiosity, with a far greater focus on helping children to develop their independent skills. Teachers should continue to develop their explanations of children's learning so that children can understand better what they are learning and why. Teachers use praise frequently to recognise children's achievements. They need to develop further how they use verbal and, where appropriate, written feedback. This will help children understand better when they have been successful and what they need to do to improve.
- Each child's needs are assessed effectively prior to placement at the unit. Thereafter, teachers observe each child to assess how well they are coping with a task. Teachers have recently

worked with partners to develop more robust approaches to assessment. This is helping them to build their confidence in assessing the development of children's social and communication skills. Teachers need to continue to develop approaches to assessment to provide valid and robust evidence of children's progress across the curriculum.

- Teachers use an online platform to provide parents with regular updates on their child's learning. Parents value this communication to help them understand the learning their child experiences.
- Teachers plan learning, which helps children to develop their understanding of routines. This helps children to have consistent expectations each day and settle well into class. Senior leaders have very recently introduced a lifeskills framework, which builds children's skills progressively on what they can already do. Teachers are just beginning to plan learning using the framework. They need to use this more effectively to develop further all aspects of high-quality learning and teaching. Assessment of children's progress needs to inform lesson planning more effectively. This includes providing children with increased levels of challenge in their daily experiences. Teachers need to develop how they will track and monitor children's progress as they develop their skills.

QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- The small number of children and the diverse range of their ages and additional support needs renders comparison of groups or cohorts invalid. Teachers are at the very early stages of gathering reliable information on children's progress. As such, the school is unable to evidence how well children are progressing in their learning. Overall, the majority of children are making satisfactory progress in their learning. Almost all children are capable of attaining more.
- The majority of children are developing steadily their language and communication skills. This includes younger children making choices, improving their concentration and responding to adults and other children appropriately. Older children express their views clearly using appropriate communication resources. A minority of children need more support to improve their communication skills further and sustain their engagement in given tasks.
- The majority of children are developing their numeracy and mathematics skills well. They are beginning to apply these skills to a few real-life contexts. Children working at pre-early CfE levels use materials or objects to begin the skill of counting. Children working within nationally expected levels, complete calculations correctly using the four operations.
- Teachers need to develop a far greater focus on ensuring children make improved progress against their individual targets and across all areas of the curriculum. They need to track and monitor children's progress more rigorously. Teachers need to develop their skills in identifying individual targets for each child and how they can use these to evaluate how well children are progressing. This will support them to raise children's attainment.
- Children's personal achievements, including those from home, are celebrated through the award of certificates or recognition at school assemblies. These include, for example, children brushing their teeth independently for the first time or learning to swim. Teachers need to develop how they will help children to understand the skills they are developing through their wider achievements.
- The school's approach to equity ensures all children can access breakfast when they arrive at school. This ensures all children are ready and able to learn each day. Children are given opportunities to take part in a range of whole school activities such as assemblies and Christmas events. This helps children to feel included in the life of the school. Children have opportunities to take part in visits to community settings with their families and their peers. This helps children and their parents to make connections with others within their local and wider community.

- PEF is used to fund outdoor learning. Initial evidence shows this is helping children to make friendships with their peers in mainstream classes. Senior leaders should consider how they can evidence better the impact of PEF in closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- The majority of children learn alongside their mainstream peers in either Cuiken Primary School or their home school. This helps them to feel included in the wider school community.

Other relevant evidence

- Children experience their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education (PE) weekly.
- Moving forward, the headteacher should consult children, parents and staff on the use of PEF. With staff, the headteacher should track the impact of interventions to evidence how funding is used to close attainment gaps.
- Children have regular access to texts for personal reading through the school and class libraries. This helps to build a culture of reading in the school.
- Parents would like communication across the school to improve. The headteacher has rightly identified this is an area for improvement and has already added this as a focus in the school improvement plan. Similarly, parents would like clearer information on how bullying is addressed. The headteacher could consider how to involve the Parent Partnership and wider parent body in focus groups to discuss this and share more clearly the systems and processes the school has in place.

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.