

Summarised inspection findings

Slains Primary School

Aberdeenshire Council

29 November 2022

Key contextual information

Slains Primary School is located in rural Aberdeenshire, serving the nearby coastal village of Collieston and surrounding farms. All of the 24 children travel by car or school transport to attend school. The school does not have a nursery class.

Slains Primary School has experienced significant changes in staffing over the last two years. At the time of the inspection the acting headteacher had been in post for 14 months. The two class teachers are also new to the school. None of this team were in post at Slains Primary School during the COVID-19 pandemic when children experienced periods of remote learning. Children have experienced a range of supply and temporary teachers. The substantive headteacher is currently on secondment to another school. He led the school for 5 years prior to April 2021. A learning assistant and the school clerical officer have supported the school for many years.

On taking up post, the acting headteacher faced a significant improvement agenda, whilst also leading the school through challenges as the pandemic continued to impact on school and family life.

1.3 Leadership of change

weak

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

- There are important weaknesses in this aspect of the school's work. The local authority should take prompt action to support the acting headteacher to improve experiences and outcomes for all children. Over the last two years the school team has faced both change and challenge. The pandemic has had a negative impact on children's learning experiences and access to learning. There has been significant change in leadership and staffing. All of this has had an impact on continuity of learning. It is clear that on arrival at the school, the acting headteacher faced considerable challenge in both the operational and strategic leadership of the school. At times, the team feel overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of work required in their improvement journey. They lack skills and experience in self-evaluation and would benefit from clear guidance and support.
- Staff have identified improving children's wellbeing as a main priority. This is appropriate, as the whole community adapts to change following the pandemic. However, the pace of change and improvement is too slow, and requires more effective strategic leadership.
- All staff know the children and the community very well. Staff are very caring in their roles and understand children's individual backgrounds and circumstances. The whole staff team is committed to the school community, and cares very much about the wellbeing and achievements of all children. In refreshing the school vision and aims, they have taken account of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the wellbeing indicators. Most children can talk about the school values and aims. Staff have introduced a

house point system and older children have a leadership role as house captains. This aspect of school life is not yet embedded in school life.

- The local authority should take prompt action to support the school in improving self-evaluation to ensure change is focused on clear priorities which will support improvement in children's achievements across the curriculum. Current approaches to leadership of change and self-evaluation do not support improving outcomes for children. The staff team does not yet have robust approaches to monitoring the work of the school, the quality of learning and teaching, or outcomes for learners. There is insufficient reliable data or information available about children's prior learning, progress or planned learning. There is a need to ensure all team members are fully involved, and have a shared understanding of whole school expectations, standards and approaches. Professional learning should include support staff who play a key role in supporting individual learners. Agreed processes should be implemented and used consistently across the school. An important first step is to ensure a whole school approach to assessment is established. This should include effective and consistent approaches the planning of learning and teaching.
- The staff engage well as a team, and are willing learners. Staff demonstrate creativity in the classroom, when teachers deploy a range of teaching approaches, including emerging play based learning. The acting headteacher should ensure regular collegiate opportunities for high quality discussion about the work of the school, and evaluate the impact on outcomes for learners consistently and systematically. Staff need guidance and support in their improvement journey. The acting headteacher needs to provide staff with opportunities to have regular high quality professional learning. The acting headteacher should ensure these meetings do not focus on the day to day running of the school.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

weak

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

- There are important weaknesses within this aspect of the school's work. The local authority should take prompt action to support the acting headteacher to improve learning, teaching and assessment across all stages. The school have faced significant changes in staffing in recent years. The team who are now in place work well together and the small school setting facilitates daily communication. The team knows the children well, and are all aware of family circumstances and the impact of the pandemic on a few children. Children are well behaved, well-mannered and respectful. They feel safe in school and positive relationships are evident between children and staff. As a result, classrooms are calm and respectful creating an environment where purposeful learning could take place.
- Class teachers demonstrate warm and caring relationships with the children. They model respectful behaviour and create a calm learning environment. At the beginning of lessons, teachers provide clear instructions, often using text and images on whiteboards. They share with children what is to be learned, and as the lesson progresses the teachers support children to understand what is expected of them. Interaction with children includes effective questioning to determine their understanding
- The large bright classrooms and the extensive high quality outdoor areas offer scope for a range of learning and teaching approaches across the curriculum. Since her appointment, the acting headteacher has ensured teachers have increased access to a wider range of resources to support the learners' experience. A good example of this is the refreshed whole school approach to numeracy and mathematics where children now have access to concrete materials to support their learning.
- Most children listen well during lessons and follow instructions to complete tasks. When staff provide tasks and activities well matched to the children's needs, they are motivated and participate well in learning. However, in the majority of lessons observed too many children are not experiencing high quality learning activities. Children's individual learning needs are not being met and there is significant scope for children to experience more challenge in their learning. A significant number of individuals across the school are not able to access learning. Children with additional support needs (ASN) are not fully included in learning. In too many lessons children are asked to complete tasks that do not match their ability. This is a barrier to learning and in accessing a broad curriculum. Children enjoy working in pairs and groups. Staff should ensure all children are included and actively participate. The local authority should provide prompt guidance and advice to ensure the needs of children with ASN are better met.
- The school has digital provision available to all learners. However children do not have access to this on a daily basis. Too often, children access digital tools simply as follow on activities. Staff have not yet embedded digital technology in learning and teaching.

- Children should now be given more opportunities to develop confidence and leadership skills. This could be done through participating in the community and the wider life of the school.
- Staff are developing their skills in providing feedback to learners. They should continue to develop this to ensure children understand their progress in learning and next steps for improvement. The use of an online tool supports sharing of success with parents and carers. This online tool has the capacity for a range of wider functions for use by children and adults alike.
- Teachers need to review approaches to managing their day to ensure teaching time is available to support all learners. There is scope to ensure that learning is less resource driven and that maximum use is made of teaching time for all children.
- Children need many more opportunities to enable them to engage in investigative and explorative learning experiences. There is scope for children to be much more involved in leading their own learning. The school is at the early stage of implementing a play-based approach to learning and teaching. Staff are considering the environment, learning experiences and the role / interaction of the adult as they develop their knowledge. Staff should engage with national guidance including Realising the Ambition, to support improvement in children's experiences. They should now look at ways to promote play as integral to learning and teaching.
- Supported by the local authority, the school needs to give immediate attention to assessment, planning, tracking and monitoring. Current approaches are haphazard and inconsistent. As a result, there is no clear record of children's progress, attainment and achievement across the curriculum. Staff need to work together to develop a cohesive approach that supports high quality learning, teaching and assessment across the school. They need to ensure individual learners make progress and that their needs are identified, recorded and met. In improving tracking and monitoring, the team also needs guidance and support in appropriate use and analysis of data in a small school setting. This includes using the information gathered to ensure interventions planned for specific children informs next steps and has an impact on their progress. Staff need to understand and implement national and local guidance on assessment. This includes engagement with the learning, teaching and assessment and moderation cycle. There is a need for staff to reach a shared understanding of expected standards and appropriate use of National Benchmarks.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The staff team is taking steps to develop curriculum pathways for the children at Slains Primary School. They have made good progress in offering children a progressive programme across numeracy and mathematics. Staff should liaise with local authority colleagues to access well established effective learning pathways that can support the work at Slains Primary School and inform the curriculum in their unique setting.
- Staff are using the experiences and outcomes to offer a broad general education across the school. This is at an early stage of implementation, and children do not yet access all curriculum areas on a regular basis within a progressive programme. Staff have grouped experiences and outcomes to plan a yearly overview of 'coverage'. They should use this framework as they develop improved approaches to planning learning, teaching and assessment.
- The local environment offers rich opportunities for a high quality curriculum. Staff should now work with parents and the children to consider contexts to support high quality cross-curricular learning and interdisciplinary learning. In the meantime, there is a need to ensure all children experience learning across all areas of the curriculum. Understandably, following periods of disrupted learning due to the pandemic, the staff team has had a strong focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They need to take prompt action to offer children regular experiences across all curriculum areas including expressive arts.
- Children enjoy regular physical activity during the school week. Recent activity included rugby supported by a professional coach, and playing rounders outdoors. As the term progresses there is a need for staff to ensure that all children experience two hours quality physical education each week. Staff should use a progression pathway to ensure they teach all aspects of the physical education curriculum.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- During the pandemic, parents and carers felt well supported. They appreciated the efforts of staff to support learning at home. They welcome the recent re-introduction of an online application (app) that supports effective school and home communication. Parents enjoy seeing work from school being shared via the app. They also appreciate the recently introduced 'golden jotters' where children share examples of their learning. These jotters offer parents an opportunity to comment on their children's progress. Staff should now ensure a range of learning is presented in this jotter. They should be confident that the examples shared are of an appropriate standard.
- Slains Primary School has a small but supportive Parent Council. They are effective in raising funds to support resources for school improvement. Parent Council members appreciate the introduction of regular updates from the acting headteacher at their meetings. A few parents feel their views are not taken account. A few would like more information about their children's progress. Whilst parents support school events, and attend social and fund raising activities they are not yet actively involved in school improvement. The Parent Council is keen for parents to be involved in improvements to the curriculum, and in harnessing the skills, knowledge and interests of parents in these developments. Parents are also keen to share their own experiences of work with children.

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. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

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

- Staff have worked well together to establish warm, caring and nurturing relationships with the children. Children and their families feel valued and respected. The children at Slains Primary School live across a wide rural setting. Staff know the children and their families very well. Staff are aware of when children experience challenges to their wellbeing. Staff are friendly and approachable. Almost all children feel safe in school. Almost all say they have someone they can speak to if they are upset or worried about something. They regularly discuss online safety and can explain what to do if they are concerned.
- As a result of the pandemic, several children's experience of nursery was limited. Staff note it has taken children longer to develop social skills, sharing, turn taking and independence in their learning and play. A few children across the school did not engage with remote learning. They continue to experience gaps in their learning, presenting also a lack of confidence and resilience. There is a need to ensure they receive support that helps them improve at an appropriate pace.
- Children are aware of the need to be active to ensure a healthy lifestyle. They experience physical activity sessions each week. The school grounds offer children regular opportunity to play and learn outdoors. The health and wellbeing (HWB) curriculum offers opportunities to explore healthy eating. There is scope for staff to plan all of these aspects of school life more effectively to promote wellbeing and mental health, and to ensure progression in learning. There is a need to ensure children can talk about the progress they are making across all aspects of HWB.
- There is an increasing focus on UNCRC across the school. Children are beginning to link this understanding with how they feel they should behave and treat others in school and in the wider community. The school is at an early stage in supporting children to understand the wellbeing indicators as a shared vocabulary for expressing their feelings and needs.
- The acting headteacher and staff are developing their knowledge and awareness of statutory duties. The acting headteacher follows local authority guidance appropriately when situations and needs arise. Staff recognise they need support from the local authority to ensure their knowledge of legislation and statutory duties is up to date. As a priority, this should include all legislation and guidance pertaining to additional support needs. All children are respected and treated as equals and individuals. Children support each other in their play. As the school continues to develop the wellbeing, equality and inclusion agenda, there is a need to focus on equalities and ensure all staff engage with legislation including the protected characteristics. Moving forward, staff need to ensure curricular experiences offer children opportunities to understand what it is to be a citizen of Aberdeenshire and Scotland in a 21st Century world.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

weak

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 important weaknesses in children's attainment. Children are not making sufficient progress across the curriculum.
- Most children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy. Children across the school are not making sufficient progress across reading, writing and listening and talking, and mathematics. Children who need additional help with their work are not making sufficient progress in their learning.
- As this is a small school with two multi-stage composite classes, only general statements about progress have been used to ensure children's anonymity. The overall quality of children's attainment in literacy and English language and mathematics is weak. Progress in numeracy is satisfactory. Children do not experience progression in their learning across the curriculum and as a result their progress is limited. Children have insufficient opportunity to develop skills and knowledge across the curriculum.

Listening and Talking

- Most children come to school with a well-developed vocabulary, and a range of life experiences including travel. At the early and first level, the majority of children are confident to engage in discussions with adults and talk about their everyday life events. The majority listen well to instructions. They can express their views and offer their own opinions. At second level, children explain their thinking well with increasing use of advanced vocabulary on a variety of topics. A few children listen actively when other children are speaking. There is a need to value listening and talking as a feature of the literacy curriculum. The staff team needs to build on the skills children bring to school through planned approaches to developing listening and talking as outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes.

Reading

- All children need significantly more opportunities to engage in a range of challenging texts to support them to develop further their reading skills in school. Most children need to be encouraged to develop a wider range of reading skills. There needs to be a whole school approach to developing and improving children's progress reading. Children need more frequent direct interaction with teachers when they are engaging with text. At this early stage of the school year, children working towards early level are beginning to engage with a range of texts. They are beginning to recognise and use a few initial sounds. At first level, a few children read independently and can read aloud to each other with expression. Overall, the pace of progress is too slow. At second level, children talk about books they are reading at home and in school. They enthusiastically describe their favourite genres, and highlight preferred authors. A few children across the school continue to face significant challenge in developing confidence in reading. This is a barrier to accessing texts across the curriculum.

Writing

- Children are making insufficient progress in writing. Children at the early stages need to be better supported to develop further their phonic development to improve their writing and spelling. Children need more support in effective letter formation. Children at first and second level diligently complete grammar, punctuation and spelling tasks but cannot all apply these skills with confidence in more open written tasks. Older children need time and opportunity to write short and extended texts for a range of purposes and audiences more regularly. This includes the application of writing in real life contexts.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy. Last session staff correctly identified numeracy and mathematics as an improvement priority. The introduction of a new programme for mathematics and numeracy is supporting children to develop their skills more effectively. Staff across the school have worked together to develop a concrete, pictorial, abstract approach to support the learning of numeracy concepts. This is having a positive impact on how children can identify and use different strategies to complete calculations and solve problems. Children in all classes have access to a range of helpful resources that support their learning in numeracy. For a few learners there is a need to ensure that the literacy skills required to access the numeracy programme are not a barrier to success. Children are not making sufficient progress across all areas of mathematics. To enhance learning and raise attainment further, children need to improve their skills in applying their knowledge in unfamiliar and real life contexts.

Number, money and measurement

- All children at early level are becoming confident in identifying and recognising numbers to 20, ordering numbers forwards and backwards and identifying the number before, after and missing numbers. Children respond well when this is within play-based activities. Daily routines enable children to learn about the days of the week, and months of the year. Cooking activities provide opportunities to explore weight and volume. By first level, the majority of children identify the value of digits in three digit numbers and round to the nearest ten and hundred. The majority of children use known strategies to solve problems. They are beginning to talk about the strategies they have used to reach an answer. At second level, most children confidently explain the link between a digit, its place and its value for whole numbers to 100,000; round numbers to the nearest 1000, 10,000 and 100,000; and solve word problems. Most are confident when multiplying and dividing, and can add and subtract decimals. Children can solve problems and calculate durations of events.
- There is a need to ensure children have regular planned opportunities to learn and practise skills across measurement, shape position and movement, and information handling. Children are making insufficient progress in these aspects of their learning.

Attainment over time

- The school does not have reliable data which shows children's attainment over time. The acting headteacher advised us that no data was available to her on taking up post. Data currently available is not robust and does not always reflect children's progress. Tracking and monitoring of children's progress is not yet sufficiently well developed to give an indication of how well children are progressing over time. The acting headteacher and her team need to continue to develop approaches to gathering data on children's progress, which reliably illustrates how well children are attaining over time.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children are developing leadership skills, through for example organising Red Nose Day and other charity events. This is supporting them to developing well their organisational and team working skills. Children in P4-P7 were involved in the John Muir Award, developing well their

awareness of environmental issues and being encouraged to become responsible citizens. Achievements beyond school and across the farming community are celebrated in a variety of ways including at assemblies, using social media and wall displays. Children are not yet able to discuss the skills they are developing through their achievements. There is a need to track children's participation and achievements, and ensure all children have opportunities to develop a wide range of skills for learning, life and work.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know all children and families very well. The school is in receipt of a small amount of Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). This has been used to purchase resources to support the delivery of reading, writing, numeracy and cooking across the school. We have asked the acting headteacher to ensure PEF is used to raise attainment of targeted children as well as contributing to the school's planned universal support for literacy and numeracy. Close tracking of these targeted and universal supports should focus on raising attainment for children who face barriers to their learning.

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.