

Summarised inspection findings

Braemar Primary School

Aberdeenshire Council

27 February 2024

Key contextual information

Braemar Primary School is a small rural school set in Aberdeenshire. It is part of the Aboyne network of schools. Currently there are 31 children in the school split between two classes. There is a P1 to P4 class and a P5 to P7 class. The headteacher has a teaching commitment and has been in post for over four years. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) indicates that most children who attend the school reside in decile 9. The nursery was inspected in the same week as the school.

1.3 Leadership of change

very good

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement which is meaningful and relevant to the context of the school within its community. Planning for continuous improvement should be evidence-based and linked to effective self-evaluation. Senior leaders should ensure the need for change is well understood and that the pace of change is appropriate to ensure the desired positive impact for learners. The themes are:

- developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- strategic planning for continuous improvement
- implementing improvement and change

- The headteacher and staff team have embedded the school values of secure environment, mutual respect, achievements, resilience and teamwork (SMART). The values, created and reviewed by all stakeholders, are well established and understood. Children and staff demonstrate these values well in their daily interactions resulting in a positive learning ethos across the school. The staff team recognise the challenges they face as a small rural school. The headteacher uses digital technology to reach beyond Braemar to ensure children have a breadth of experience. Teachers and the headteacher have developed strong successful partnerships with local businesses and the community. This is helping children to develop skills which will enhance their future learning and career pathways.
- The highly-effective headteacher is dedicated to school improvement, ensuring everyone has an important voice in influencing change. Her subtle, understated and supportive leadership is delivering positive outcomes for children through continuous school improvement. She has empowered the staff team to collaborate successfully and lead on areas of school improvement. This includes, for example, a new approach to teaching writing. She supports all staff well to develop and reflect on pedagogy continuously through high-quality professional learning and discussion. An effectual staff online tool links current and previous learning and allows teachers to share professional reading, training and resources. This commitment to professional learning is impacting very positively on learning and teaching and the experiences of children. The staff team work very well in partnership to effect change which leads to school improvements, for example, in digital technology.
- The headteacher knows the school's strengths and areas for development very well. She has robust systems of quality assurance for learning in place, including a detailed assessment and moderation calendar. There are regular self-evaluation opportunities for staff and children to review progress towards planned improvement outcomes. Children evaluate learning and teaching regularly. They consider what an effective learner looks like and what makes a good lesson. Children understand the expectations and their role as a learner. The headteacher, teachers and staff shape school priorities based on robust self-evaluation and data. As planned, staff should continue to seek the views and engagement of parents in school self-evaluation and improvement.

- The headteacher and teachers created a useful parent toolkit which support parents to understand how they can build on children's learning. Children and teachers invite parents into school regularly to learn about children's learning across the curriculum. Children plan and lead parent events, for example, they provided recent inputs on a health and wellbeing programme and a numeracy event. Feedback from parents is very positive on these learning events. They can see clearly the progress their children make.
- Staff value opportunities to develop wider networks as part of the improvement journey, through work with the Northern Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC). These collaborative learning experiences help staff to develop a broader view, engage in moderation and increase confidence in their practice.
- Children across the school have frequent opportunities to develop their leadership skills successfully. They lead school improvement groups including the pupil council, a wellbeing group and a digital leader's group. They talk confidently about the positive impact of their work. Children have collaborated with local businesses in recent years on projects to support the school and community. For example, outreach lessons with the countryside ranger and a music and literacy project with a local arts and heritage centre. Children talk animatedly about their experiences in outdoor learning and expressive arts. Children benefit from the responsibility for planning and leading clubs for other children. Through these roles children develop their skills in organising, collaborating, critical thinking and problem solving. All children articulate well the meta skills they are developing and feel valued and included in the life of the school. The headteacher and staff should continue to look for meaningful ways for younger children to have more leadership opportunities.
- The school receives a small amount of pupil equity funding (PEF). This has been used to purchase resources to support the emotional health and wellbeing for all children, including those identified with social and emotional needs. This new approach to supporting emotional wellbeing is having a significant positive impact on all children's understanding of emotions, and their resilience and wellbeing. Teachers use this resource effectively to support a few identified learners to understand their feelings better, helping them to engage better with their learning. The headteacher should now strengthen the role of parents in planning how PEF is spent.
- The headteacher has been instrumental in leading change which has had a positive impact on children's learning. This includes, for example, the successful development of digital literacy. Children are highly skilled in the use of information technology (IT) and have created blogs, developed an app, used micro bits and learned about coding. IT is embedded in everyday learning as a tool to enhance and extend learning and to provide effective support for children with barriers to learning.

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

- The staff team demonstrate caring, compassionate and nurturing relationships with all children. Children across the school have developed close relationships and help each other willingly in class. These positive interactions create a calm, purposeful learning environment, where most children engage very well in their learning.
- Children have developed a 'Braemar Learner Statement' which exemplifies how to be a good learner. Children understand that in order to be successful learners they need to check over their work, challenge themselves, learn from mistakes and reflect on their learning. Most children are confident and enthusiastic when talking about current and previous learning. Most children are motivated to learn, particularly when the right level of challenge and opportunities for choice are included in lessons. In the P5 to P7 class, children access an 'enable table', which they have created with resources to support learning. These include hundred squares, spelling aids and writing resources. This helps them to be independent in their learning. They now plan to support the P1 to P4 class to develop an 'enable table' for their classroom.
- Children create targets in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and a target of their own choice. Teachers and children regularly review these targets to help children to see the progress they are making in their learning. Children reflect on learning and teaching through 'Friday feedback'. This is allowing children to think about where learning is successful and what would help them to progress further in learning. It also supports the teacher to check if children understand learning fully, or if further consolidation of learning is required. Children are developing the skills to give appropriate peer feedback on learning using success criteria to identify next steps. Children value these comments from their peers. Teachers ensure children have personalisation and choice through the use of relevant contexts for learning. Children have opportunities to choose learning activities based on their interests, for example, learning about the local area. This is supporting children to stay focussed and engage well in learning. Vertical groupings for Masterclasses on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), design and construction enable children to use and develop meta skills, which they articulate well.
- In most lessons, teachers provide clear instructions and almost all children know how to be successful. Children work individually, in groups and with partners. Older children ably support younger children, consolidating their own learning as they do so. Teachers know children very well. This allows them to personalise learning to meet the needs of most children successfully. A few children across the school would benefit from reviewing the presentation of written work in jotters. Teachers should support children in this by setting high expectations of presentation in all work. In a few lessons, there is scope for the pace of learning to be brisker. Teachers, across the school, should extend and challenge a few children's learning further, particularly in numeracy.

- Teachers engage frequently in relevant high-quality professional learning and discussion. They are highly reflective about their practice and committed to ongoing professional development, which is evidenced well in staff online toolkits. This is supporting teachers to refine learning and teaching. This includes, for example, a recent focus on feedback which is leading to improvements in children's writing. Feedback on children's writing is increasingly linked to the success criteria. Teacher comments clearly show the next steps children need to take to improve their writing including the increased use of descriptive language. As a result, children articulate well what they need to do to improve their writing.
- The use of digital technology is embedded across the school. Children have access to tablets and laptops to support and enhance learning. In the upper primary, for example, children can choose to complete written work on a computer, tablet or in a jotter. Pupils select confidently the method which suits them best. Children who require support with learning use digital technology to make learning more accessible and to enhance their learning. This includes, for example, the use of immersive reader or 'speech to text' tools. Children use technology to access, share and support learning. Children share their online learning profiles confidently which support parents to see their children's learning and progress. The wide range of digital learning experiences are supporting children's learning very well.
- Staff lead the development of play approaches and have collaborated with Northern Alliance RIC and other colleagues over a period of time. Teachers and the headteacher have researched this area and developed a play policy which has been shared with parents. There is scope to improve the environment and planning for play to ensure it extends and deepens children's learning, creativity and offers greater challenge. Staff should now review the way they plan and develop play pedagogy to ensure it meets the needs of all children in a multi-stage class. They should refer to national guidance as part of this process. This will further support children to access rich learning experiences which develop their curiosity and problem-solving skills whilst ensuring challenge.
- Teachers plan learning across the curriculum using progressive planners and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) experiences and outcomes. They use the whole school rolling curriculum programme well to support effective planning for a multi-stage class. Recently older children used the experiences and outcomes to plan learning successfully for a history topic. Children are involved routinely in planning learning and events across the school, their voice is valued and included.
- Teachers use a wide range of formative and summative assessments in literacy and numeracy to inform planning and to ensure there are no gaps in learning. Assessments also support teachers' confidence in their accurate understanding of children's attainment of a level. As planned, teachers should continue to develop high quality assessments which enable children to transfer their learning to new and unfamiliar contexts.
- The headteacher and teachers discuss continually the progress of individual children during informal and formal meetings. Termly tracking meetings allow in-depth discussion and record the progress children are making in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Teachers use data well from a range of assessments to ensure their judgements are robust. As a result of tracking meetings, interventions are planned to meet the needs of children who are not making expected progress or who are working beyond their CfE levels.
- Teachers have restarted moderation activities with local schools. They are involved currently in writing moderation with a local school. Teachers welcome these opportunities to moderate learning with colleagues. Teachers should continue to collaborate and share good practice both within and out with school.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use progressive pathways in all curricular areas to plan learning. They have bundled experiences and outcomes and created a three-year plan for inter-disciplinary learning. This ensures children have a broad and varied experience in the multi-stage classes. Staff also ensure flexibility in planning to allow for local or national events to be included in learning experiences.
- The headteacher and staff created a 'Braemar curriculum infographic' to help children and parents understand the breadth of the curriculum. Learning is linked skilfully to the local environment, skills for learning, life and work and sustainability. Newsletters and regular 'pupils as teacher, parents as learners' (PATPAL) sessions are valued by parents. They support parents well to understand the breadth of curriculum pathways in place and the learning experiences children have.
- Outdoor learning is a regular feature across the school curriculum. It is appropriately linked to current learning. Teachers should now develop a progressive outdoor learning plan to ensure children experience a progressive outdoor curriculum as they move through the school.
- Teachers are developing a literacy-rich experience for children through the reading and writing curriculum pathways. The introduction of a recent writing progressive programme is already having a positive impact on the detail, vocabulary and description within children's writing. Children have access to class libraries and enjoy daily reading for pleasure.
- Teachers plan a wide range of appropriate experiences to enhance and extend children's skills and curriculum. For example, residential trips, museum visits and the garden club, which achieved the Royal Horticultural Society Level 4 award. All children took part in a highly successful careers fair involving local businesses which motivated children to think about future careers and aspirations.
- Children learn French from P1 to P7. Older children experience a range of languages including Spanish, German and Latvian. Currently they are challenging themselves to learn how to count in 10 languages.
- Children receive their entitlement to two hours of high-quality physical education each week. They are becoming skilled at giving each other helpful feedback based on success criteria to improve their techniques in dance.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- Parents value the regular communication from the school. This includes children’s learning journals, newsletters and information on how to support learning. Parents have been very positive about opportunities to come into school to learn more about the numeracy and health and wellbeing curriculum. Parents have opportunities to comment on the work of the school and school improvement. The school would like to increase further these opportunities.
- The Parent Council supports the work of the school very well. Together with staff, they work in partnership to improve children’s experiences. They also collaborate with the pupil council, through letters and meetings. The Parent Council have raised considerable funds to pay for a playground shelter, several school trips and events. They work effectively alongside staff to strive to reduce the cost of the school day.

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

very good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Braemar Primary School is at the heart of the local community. Staff know children as individuals and as learners, which helps them to support children and families very well. The school has a friendly, welcoming ethos, which children and staff say 'feels like one big family'. Almost all children agree the staff treat them fairly and with respect. They have a trusted adult they can talk to and friends who look out for them. The school values are very-well embedded, and children's rights are a regular feature of school assemblies. Children across the school should now have increased opportunities to understand what their rights mean for them and others in their daily lives.
- The headteacher and staff prioritised supporting children's health and wellbeing in recent years. Almost all children know and understand the wellbeing indicators well. They understand how to keep themselves safe, active, and healthy. Children talk confidently about how well they are included in the life of the school. Their voice is listened to and respected. Children have a say in how their school develops and in how they learn. They engage in mature discussions about the importance of including everyone. The school is very inclusive. Children value and look out for one another. This is helping children to feel comfortable in their environment and to take risks in learning and make mistakes. They are secure in their relationships with teachers and adults. Children know adults are there to help and challenge them to achieve success in their learning.
- Children regularly complete wellbeing webs where they comment on each wellbeing indicator. The headteacher tracks every child's wellbeing web. She has created a helpful spreadsheet to capture this information over time. This effective use of data allows school staff to take prompt action to support any child who raises a wellbeing concern. There are examples of impactful targeted interventions and changes to routines following children's feedback. The tracking allows the headteacher to analyse data on wellbeing indicators which are then used to plan future learning and assemblies to support children's needs. The pupil led wellbeing group developed a wellbeing library to encourage children to read about their emotions. Members share tips on how to keep calm and manage emotions through displays and assemblies. This focus on wellbeing supports children to feel cared for and helps them to be ready to learn.
- Children value frequent opportunities to be responsible for leading and taking part in school improvement groups. These groups make a positive difference to the school and, often, the community. The children regularly plan events including a charity coffee morning. They led improvements to the playground following on from the results of surveys children created. All children have opportunities to plan events for parents and lead clubs. This is helping them to contribute effectively to the life of the school and understand that they can impact change.
- Children have a well-developed understanding of meta skills. They articulate clearly the skills they are learning in leadership roles, and they understand the importance of developing these

skills for future careers. Children explain how teacher and peer feedback helps them to appreciate their achievements, both in and out of school. The headteacher is tracking the skills children develop as they move through school to enable staff to plan for any gaps in skills through clubs, trips and learning experiences.

- The headteacher and teachers have created a shared language around wellbeing, using the wellbeing indicators and an emotional wellbeing resource. This is supporting successfully all children to express themselves clearly to the adults, which enables adults to support appropriately.
- The headteacher ensures all staff are up to date with training on statutory duties. This includes training on meeting children's needs, nurture, getting it right for every child and promoting equity and inclusion. Staff meet regularly to discuss the needs of individuals and to review interventions and plans to ensure children are making expected progress. Teachers work well with a range of partners to meet the needs of children, for example, links with the local secondary school to promote nurture and early transition. Children with barriers to learning are making good progress towards their own identified targets. Staff should continue to engage with relevant training to continue to meet the needs of all children.
- The small numbers of children allow for regular dialogue between staff to share good practice and meet the needs of children. There is a clear staged intervention process to ensure children with barriers to their learning are identified and supported. Skilled support staff build children's confidence. They reinforce learning through daily literacy and numeracy interventions. Data gathered from interventions show the positive impact on children's literacy skills.
- Almost all children say they feel cared for, included and safe in school. They have regular opportunities to discuss their feelings and any worries with the headteacher. All staff are highly attuned to the needs of all children. Staff work closely with parents and partners to support children who experience any barriers to learning. Children who require support with learning have individual plans. Parents and children are involved in reviewing and planning how children are supported. The impact of interventions from skilled support staff and teachers is seen in the progress children are making towards their targets and in their daily positive interactions. The school is creative in the ways it meets children's needs, tailoring learning to individual children's interests. Staff regularly review the support children receive through universal and targeted interventions. As a next step, the headteacher should ensure the progress of specific interventions are measured carefully. This will enable successful interventions to be extended and less successful interventions to be adapted.
- The headteacher is proactive in following up any incidents of unauthorised or prolonged absence. Attendance has been above or in line with the national average in recent years.
- A clear positive relationship policy supports staff to deal sensitively with any incidents where children become overwhelmed or distressed. Children understand the adults will help them to resolve any issues and listen to both sides of any disagreement. The school follows Aberdeenshire Council's anti-bullying policy and records any incidents in line with authority guidance. Staff have attended professional learning on supporting children when they become distressed.
- There is a well-planned transition programme for children starting nursery, P1 and moving on to secondary education. As a result, children show increased confidence and resilience. Parents report the positive impact transition arrangements have had on children as they move to secondary school or start school from nursery.

- The progressive health and wellbeing programme is used to teach children about healthy lifestyles, relationships, keeping themselves safe and difference. Children also experience learning around health topics through assemblies and well-established links with partners. Children have a very strong sense of fairness. They understand the difference between equity and equality. Children discuss sensitively why children should get what they need to be successful, which may not be the same for everyone. Children consider complex philosophical questions in a mature way, listening respectfully to the views of others. They have learned about disabilities and the barriers to learning some children and adults face. Teachers should continue to develop the ways children learn about protected characteristics.

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

Children's progress and attainment is expressed in 'overall' statements rather than for specific year groups. This is because of the very small numbers of children at each stage.

- Overall, the quality of children's attainment is good. Most children achieve national levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. A few children are working beyond national levels of attainment. Children who require support with learning are making good progress towards their own targets.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Most children make good progress against prior levels of attainment. A few children could be making even better progress in learning.

Listening and talking

- Most younger children are experienced at talking in groups and in front of their class. They share their views and answer simple questions. Children at early level need more opportunities to practice when to listen and let others share their views. Children who are working at first level listen well to each other and share their ideas confidently. They share recent learning enthusiastically, referring to texts and information they have learned. They would benefit from further opportunities to develop note taking skills. Most older children are respectful of the opinions of others and share their viewpoint confidently, with evidence to explain why they feel that way. They understand a range of techniques to enhance their presentation skills such as projecting their voice and using eye contact. Children working at second level should now develop further skills in reflecting and building on the contributions of others in discussions.

Reading

- Most younger children use their knowledge of sounds and letters to blend and sound out words. They are beginning to read simple words and recognise rhyming patterns. Younger children talk enthusiastically about stories they have read, what happens in the story and who the main characters are. They should continue to develop their vocabulary and reading fluency. At first level most children are developing their decoding strategies and using context clues to support their understanding of a text. They are developing their fluency in reading and share accurately the main points of a story or chapter. At first level children would benefit from reviewing the differences between fiction and non-fiction texts and the features of non-fiction texts. At second level children have a very well-developed understanding of reading skills. They skim and scan to find information in a text and answer inferential and evaluative questions. They enjoy selecting books regularly and reading across a wide range of genre. Children working within second level should continue to develop their knowledge of authors and authors' different writing styles, as they extend their reading repertoire.

Writing

- Younger children attempt to spell and write simple words confidently. They enjoy opportunities for emergent writing through play and story writing tasks. Children working at first level have a good understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling to support their writing. At early and first level children would benefit from regular opportunities to share their writing, revise and extend it. At second level, children have a very strong understanding of writing features including personification, metaphors and hyperboles. They use helpful feedback from teachers and peers to improve their work. Children now need more opportunities to improve the quality of their writing through increased opportunities to write. This should include children's choice of topics and writing in a wider range of genre.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Most children are making good progress against prior levels of attainment in numeracy and mathematics. A few children are making very good progress. A few children need to be challenged further, developing strategies to solve calculations and to talk through how they arrived at an answer. This will support children to make even greater progress in numeracy.

Number, money and measure

- Younger children count forwards and backwards to 10 and 20. They know the number between and are developing their knowledge of simple addition. They are not yet confident at the timings of daily routines and units for measuring time. At first level children understand place value and count in 2s, 5s, 10s and 100s. They are developing their knowledge of multiplication and division facts. They complete money calculations with increasing accuracy and have a growing knowledge of fractions. They should continue to develop their mental agility and range of number strategies to solve number problems. At second level children have a good understanding of place value. They use their number knowledge to solve increasingly complex calculations using the four operations. They would benefit from further opportunities to develop their knowledge of percentages and fractions.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children name 2D shapes and 3D objects confidently. At first and second level children have an increasing knowledge of shapes and their properties. At second level children would benefit from revision of circumference, diameter, and radius. They would benefit from further opportunities to accurately draw and measure angles.

Information handling

- As children move from early to first level, they learn how to gather data using tally marks and how to create and use a simple graph. At second level children confidently extract information from graphs to answer questions. They understand how to create graphs and a few children use digital tools well to create graphs and charts. Children should continue to use and extend their digital skills in information handling.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher has collated data over several years. The headteacher uses individual tracking data to measure the progress of all children across the school. This data very clearly shows the good progress most children make in literacy and numeracy as they move through the school. The staff use individual plans and assessment to evidence progress for learners who require support with learning.
- Staff analyse tracking data and have a detailed knowledge of each child's progression within and across levels. They use data well to inform future school improvement priorities, for example the recent addition of a writing programme.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children's achievements in and out of school are valued and celebrated regularly through assemblies and displays. There is a clear focus on developing skills for learning, life and the world of work across the school. Children are becoming confident in the four capacities through leaderships groups and masterclasses. Children from P1 upwards articulate well the meta skills they are developing through STEM, class learning and through effective contributions to school life. These meta skills include, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and leadership skills. Children understand the skills they are developing now will support them in the future as they move into higher education and careers. The headteacher tracks the skills children develop. This helps shape future planning to ensure all children have a range of experiences.

Equity for all learners

- Staff know children and families very well and understand the socio-economic challenges in their rural community. The headteacher, teachers and the Parent Council work together to carefully consider costs for trips. They use fundraising and grants to reduce costs and ensure no child misses out. The headteacher works very well with partners, staff, parents and pupils to ensure a wide range of clubs and experiences are available as part of the school day. These enhance children's learning and ensure equity of opportunity.
- The school is allocated a small amount of PEF. Staff have used PEF to fund a wellbeing resource which is impacting positively on all children. Children are developing a greater understanding of their emotions and strategies in self-regulation. This is helping children to engage better in learning. Children have a strong understanding of equity and believe children should get what they need to achieve, which may not be the same for everyone. Currently there is no attainment gap between identified groups of children. Staff are taking appropriate steps to raise the attainment and achievement of all children.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The headteacher and staff are highly committed to continuous school improvement and ongoing professional reading, reflection and discussion to support this. As part of this improvement work they introduced meta skills across the school. From P1 to P7 children have meaningful opportunities to develop meta skills which are linked to learning and achievements. This is supporting children to understand the world of work and make important links between the skills they are practicing now and their future aspirations.

Children have many opportunities to shape the school priorities and learning. They contribute regularly through leadership groups, involvement in planning learning, and personalisation and choice. For example, children design self-evaluation surveys for peers and parents to gather views. This is developing their knowledge and skills in the four capacities. They are confident and articulate their views well. Children are passionate about making their school even better.

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.