

# Summarised inspection findings

**St Thomas' Primary School**

**North Lanarkshire Council**

**SEED No: 8516227**

**23 January 2018**

## Key contextual information

St Thomas' PSNC is situated in Wishaw, North Lanarkshire. It serves the areas of Panther, Craigneuk, Wishawhill and surrounding areas.

76.5% of children live in SIMD 1 and 2, with a few children living in SIMD 9 and 10.

The school roll at the time of inspection was 294. 24% of children have English as an additional language.

The school also benefits from a 30/30 nursery class for children aged 3-5 years, 10/10 nursery class for children aged 2-3 years and a nurture class for primary-age children.

The school benefits from being in a Scottish Attainment Challenge area.

### 1.3 Leadership of change

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

- There is a strong awareness and understanding among staff of the social, economic and cultural context of the school community. The headteacher is committed to securing improvements which will make a significant difference to the lives of children and families. It is clear that she knows staff, children and families exceptionally well and is well respected within the diverse school community. She is supported well by an enthusiastic senior management team who contribute to the improvement agenda in the school. This has a significant impact on the positive supportive ethos which permeates the life of the school.
- The school's values are based on the Catholic faith which is a strong feature of St Thomas' Primary School. The focus on these particular values results in a welcoming, nurturing environment where children feel secure. The school's vision and values are reflected in efforts to ensure children are well cared for, and motivated in their learning.
- All staff are aware of the socio-economic context of the school and its impact on children and families. Staff are respectful and proactive in overcoming difficulties children face who experience barriers to their learning. Equity for all is addressed in a variety of ways to ensure children are not adversely disadvantaged, such as sensitively ensuring children have opportunities to take part in residential outings or providing school uniform if needed.

- The Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) plan is addressing aspects of the poverty related attainment gap through a whole school focus on nurture, and outdoor learning. The plan also provides additional support for learning to improve children's progress and attainment at all stages. The appointment of a full time teacher through PEF is helping to ensure the necessary operational support to challenge and support improvement particularly for children in P1 and 2. Records are kept of progress in key areas and the success of particular interventions in literacy and numeracy, which is helping staff to better meet the learning needs of children. It is important that school improvement planning focuses on a small number of well-considered priorities, expressed as measurable and achievable outcomes for learners.
- The headteacher works hard and shows a relentless drive to lead a strong faith community school that prioritises wellbeing and equity. A strong emphasis is placed on children being the best they can be. The senior management team now need to build on strategic leadership skills to drive forward key improvements within the school, such as self-evaluation, and improving learning teaching and assessment to ensure the highest possible standards. Developing a clear framework for quality improvement will further support how well improvements are being delivered in classes throughout the school.
- There are procedures in place to monitor and evaluate change through learning observations and professional dialogue. Staff are involved in the process of change using tools such as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal) PESTEL analysis to help decide strategic change and the direction of travel for the school. A clear and focused monitoring strategy for all staff has the potential to support raising attainment for all children. It is important that plans for improvements are supported by rigorous self-evaluation to demonstrate evidence of positive impact for children. Staff, across the school, need to be able to evidence more clearly the impact of their actions on improving outcomes for learners.
- The school takes account of the views of parents and external stakeholders. Parents views are acted upon such as the 'what you asked us to do and what we did'. External stakeholders and local businesses are regularly asked for their views on further developing the work of the school.

## 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

good

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 quality of climate and relationships is a clear strength of the school. Staff's commitment to creating a positive and purposeful climate characterised by mutual respect, trust and confidence is strong. Interactions between all members of the school community are positive and focus on the emotional needs of children. Children are benefitting from being part of this inclusive community in which there are positive relationships with staff and their peers. Senior leaders create a culture in which each child is valued. They involve staff in establishing effective approaches to positive relationships, behaviour and promoting a sense of security and trust. The impact is that children feel nurtured and cared for.
- Learners' experiences are enhanced through a variety of activities, outdoor education experiences including a range of trips and excursions. These experiences are linked to the curriculum and through the breadth of the life of the school. As a result, children are developing the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities.
- In the majority of lessons, tasks and activities are well matched to the needs of children. Planning should include consideration of how best the needs of individual and groups of children will be met. Overall, there is further scope to meet the needs of children through more effective differentiation, in particular, those who have English as an additional language.
- Most teachers provide clear and helpful explanations and instructions. There is a need to use learners' responses more effectively to encourage children to express ideas and ask questions. There is scope for teachers to share practice across the school so that they are consistently using questions to develop high order thinking skills.
- In most lessons, children understand the purpose of learning and whether they have been successful. In a few classes, children contribute to the success criteria and use this effectively to gauge their own progress. There is scope to extend this more widely across the school.
- At times, learning can be overly teacher directed. There is scope for children to have more independence and take greater responsibility for their learning.
- The school has recently introduced learning journals as a way of children exploring the language of learning and to developing their skills as learners. Monitoring the impact of this work will be important in ensuring that feedback provided to children is effective and

results in children being aware of themselves as learners. Children are not yet able to confidently articulate their strengths and next steps in learning. This also extends to their ability in discussing their skills.

- Teachers recognise the need to gather good quality evidence of learners' progress by using a carefully planned blend of approaches to the kinds of evidence used. To use each form of assessment to best effect, staff need to develop further their understanding of assessment approaches including breadth, challenge and application of learning. They must be clear why children are being assessed, what the assessment is intended to achieve and how the assessment information will be used. Senior leaders, working with staff, should develop an assessment policy which makes clear the principles of assessment. As a result, children will be able to show more accurately what they know, understand and can do.
- Moving forward, staff need to engage in more regular moderation activity to ensure that there is a shared understanding of standards and expectations. This will help staff make confident professional judgements about how well children are achieving and progressing. Staff agreed fully that moderation needs to be viewed as ongoing before, during and after the planning of learning, teaching and assessment and are keen to take this forward.
- Staff acknowledge the need to make greater use of the National Benchmarks for literacy and numeracy to support them in assessing progress and achievement
- Teachers use long-term plans to outline the structure of the year and the ways in which learning is organised throughout the whole year. Medium-term planning should be short and focused on the main learning activities developed from the Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) across all curricular areas. Teachers recognise their next step in grouping Es and Os together in ways which meet the needs of children on an ongoing basis. Short-term planning on a daily or weekly basis should be flexible and be regarded as working notes to help organise learning. Teachers do not need to spend excessive time writing detailed descriptions of learning activities or completing detailed daily or weekly planning templates or writing detailed evaluations of plans.
- Overall, there needs to be a shared understanding of what constitutes effective teaching, learning and assessment. Staff should build on existing good practice to ensure consistently high-quality learning and teaching across the school.

## 2.2 Curriculum: Learning Pathways

- There are progressive pathways for all curriculum areas. There is a mix of commercial, local authority and school guidance used to develop curriculum pathways. The learning pathways help structure the next planning block for staff and provide support for them to do this. Greater consideration now needs to be given to how the pathways are used to help staff plan the next steps in learning which support progress for different groups of children.
- Regular use is made of the outdoor area that provides a motivating context for learning for specific groups of children. Staff have created an orienteering activity which the school is planning to use with all children. The school could consider the creation of a programme of progressive skills for the outdoor area to further enrich and enhance the use of the school grounds and the local community.
- There are a few examples of children using digital technology to support their learning well. The school recognises the need to further develop its information technology and communications pathways to ensure they are progressive and relevant.
- The school uses the four capacities as a framework to support the development of skills for learning, life and the work. Progress in these skills is recorded and discussed with children in their personal learning journey books. Staff could consider building on this process to ensure that such experiences are progressively planned across the four contexts for learning.
- Across the school there is a soft start in the morning. This approach is very supportive to most of the children. However, this approach needs reviewed to ensure it is supporting all children. In a few cases, this time could be utilised more fully to enhance learning experiences for children.
- The school are not yet meeting national target of two hours of quality physical education provision.

## 2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners - Parental Engagement

- The school engages with parents in a range of different ways. Parents welcome the use of social media, newsletters and texts to keep them well informed of the life of the school and at other times their own child's achievements. The school has an open-door policy where staff take time to make parents feel welcome. Parents are encouraged to attend termly consultations along with their child to discuss their child's learning journey, progress in their learning and discuss targets for the next term. The school should now evaluate the impact of this in terms of children progress in literacy and numeracy.
- Parents' views are welcomed by staff. They are regularly consulted about new developments in the school. The school's work in building relationships with parents in the community is very successful. A recent initiative to understand the importance of attachment involving parents of children in Primary 7 has been warmly received. To further develop this staff should now evaluate the impact over time in terms of children's progress in their learning.
- Parents are actively encouraged to volunteer their time in helping at after school clubs. The 'Soup Club' is led by a parent helpers who helps older children make soup to take home using simple and readily available ingredients.
- Stakeholders are warmly welcomed and encouraged to participate in the life of the school. A Credit Union (CU) scheme for pupils has been in place for a number of years. Older children help the CU volunteers which is giving them a more realistic sense of financial issues in everyday life.
- To improve parental engagement further the school could consider how they involve parents in school improvement planning. This could, include evaluating the impact of increasing parental engagement on raising children's attainment and achievement.

## 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

- Ensuring children's wellbeing is a major strength of the school. There are aspects of very strong practice in the approaches used by staff to support children's emotional development. All children are valued, cared for, respected and included without any prejudice or judgement. The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) wellbeing indicators are fully understood and implemented by all staff and children in the school. As a result children feel safe and secure in a warm and welcoming environment. The emphasis on a whole school approach to nurture is an integral component of this success.
- All staff, have received professional learning to upskill their knowledge and understanding of nurture to help them support children better in their wellbeing. Nurturing approaches have also been extended to Primary 7 parents and children. The impact of this is shown in highly positive relationships between staff and children. Issues of poor behaviour are rare. Children are respectful of each other and as a result are in a more positive place to learn. All children have a trusted key adult, either a teacher or support assistant chosen by themselves, whom they can contact, confide in or meet with on request. Children told us this helps them with any worries or if they feel vulnerable.
- The school has effective strategies in place to help children overcome any barriers to their learning. The school has a robust process to support children and has positive links with other services to help support children's learning. Individuals from external agencies report that they feel included as part of the team within the school when their skills are required. Effective individualised plans are in place for children who have additional support needs. These plans are agreed with parents and reviewed termly.
- Particular programmes are introduced to enhance children's skills. A number of children are making progress as a result, according to their current level of attainment. Children with English as an additional language are included well in school and overall are making good progress. The nurture class provision helps to minimise barriers to learning for some children. Interactions with staff are positive and children find the nurture class an enjoyable, safe and supportive place to learn.
- Children have a positive understanding of keeping fit and healthy. They enjoy taking part in the daily mile. They are developing leadership skills through the pupil council and being buddies to younger children. Children are proud of and particularly enjoy the opportunities for learning outdoors and feel that they have contributed to its development through offering their views and ideas.

### 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

- School data indicates that in P1 almost all children are achieving appropriate Curriculum for Excellence levels in listening and talking and numeracy. Most children are achieving appropriate levels in reading and the majority of children are achieving appropriate levels in writing. In P4 almost all children are achieving appropriate Curriculum for Excellence levels in reading. Most children are achieving appropriate levels in writing and listening and talking and numeracy. In Primary 7 almost all children are achieving appropriate Curriculum for Excellence levels in listening and talking. Most children are achieving appropriate levels in reading and numeracy and the majority of children are achieving appropriate levels in writing.
- Though classroom observations, scrutiny of children's work, discussion with staff at all levels, and focus groups of children, the inspection team consider these results to be overestimated. They do not accurately reflect the attainment of children across the school. The school recognise that they now need to have a stronger focus on making more reliable and valid teacher professional judgements.

#### English Language and literacy

- Overall, most children are making good progress in literacy and English language.
- Across the school, almost all children listen and respond well to adults and each other in a respectful and courteous manner. At the early stages, children are developing their talking and listening skills through role play activities in the listening centre. Across first and second level, most children are making satisfactory progress in contributing their ideas and opinions when engaging with others. By P7, the majority of children communicate clearly, audibly and with expression. Children across the school would benefit from structured and planned opportunities across the curriculum to develop skills progression in listening and talking.
- Across the early stages, most children are beginning to use phonics to decode common words in texts. As they progress through the school, children are developing their understanding of how to use texts for a range of purposes and by P7, most children can select from a range of relevant texts. Children in upper stages are developing a range of reading skills to enable them to analyse and evaluate texts more effectively. They now require more challenging texts, particularly in the upper stages.
- Across the school children write for a variety of purposes. At early level the majority of children are using capital letters and full stops to support the meaning of their writing. At

the early stages, children are developing their understanding of words and how to put these together to form a sentence. They use magnetic letters well to build words. As they move through the school, children are beginning to use a wider range of punctuation, vocabulary and structure in their writing. Children across the school are benefiting from opportunities to write across the curriculum. They now need to be engaged in extended writing more frequently to help them build on prior learning and practise and refine their skills.

### **Numeracy and Mathematics**

- Overall attainment in numeracy and mathematics is satisfactory. The introduction of a focus on mental maths is starting to impact on children's ability to manipulate numbers. There are a significant number of children who have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Across the school children are at the early stages of being able to describe the strategies they use to find the answer to calculations. Continuing to focus on this area will support children in their numeracy and mathematics. The further development of regular and planned opportunities to apply learning will support children to develop and apply knowledge and understanding to help raise attainment.
- Number and number processes - In P7 the majority of children can round whole numbers to the nearest 10,000 and can explain the link between a digit and its place for whole numbers to 10,000. A few children can convert between equivalent forms of common fractions, decimal fractions and decimal fractions. A few children can solve simple algebraic equations with one variable. In P4 the majority of children can round to 10 and 100. The majority of children can solve simple two-step problems using addition and subtraction. A few children can use a.m. and p.m. correctly and tell the time on an analogue clock to half past and o'clock. A few could order simple fractions. In P1 most children could recount the days of the week. The majority of children can recognise numbers to 10 and the corresponding value.
- Shape position and movement - In P7 most children can describe common 2D shapes and 3D objects using face, edges, base and shapes. A few children can understand 90 degrees is a right angle. In P4 the majority of children can identify simple 2D and 3D objects. A few can identify the features of a cuboid. In P1 the majority of children can identify simple 2D shapes.
- Information handling - In P7 and P4 the majority of children were able to use mathematical language appropriately to describe the likelihood of events occurring in everyday situations.

### **Attainment over time**

- School data indicates overall across most stages there has been improvements in the percentage of children achieving Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy. However, the school recognise the difficulties in the accuracy and validity of the judgements that underpin these levels.
- The school recognises that the good start to analysis of data can now be extended to include deeper analysis of different cohorts of children to help target interventions. The school recognises the need to continue to develop the ability of the staff to use data to support progress and inform next steps.

### **Overall quality of learner's achievement**

- The school provides a range of activities that allow children to achieve. They work hard in addressing the barriers to participation that some children face. These achievements are recorded and recognised under the 4 capacities in children's learning journals. Children's achievements are also recognised and celebrated through displays awards and certificates at assemblies and through social media. The majority of children understand how these achievements help them develop knowledge and skills for life, learning and work.

### **Equity for all learners**

- Staff are aware of the social and economic context of their school community. Pupil equity funding is being used to support children at early stages of the school. The initial signs of these interventions are that they are having a positive impact. The school recognises the importance of analysing data to demonstrate whether interventions are closing the poverty related attainment gap. Staff should, with support from senior leaders, further interrogate attainment data to identify gaps specific to particular stages.

## School choice of QI: 2.5 Family Learning

- **Theme 1 Engaging families in learning**
- **Theme 2 Early intervention and prevention**
- **Theme 3 Quality of family learning programmes**

- Senior leaders have placed considerable importance in engaging with families and this is reflected in the school improvement plan. The early learning and childcare setting values the contribution of parents and families. Senior leaders have a vision for family learning in the early learning and childcare (ELC) setting and are aware of existing strengths and areas for improvement. They now need to continue to further develop the vision for family learning in the ELC and to evaluate the impact of interventions designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning more effectively.
- The headteacher demonstrates a relentless commitment to ensuring that families receive support which meets their needs. The headteacher provided examples of positive impact of this support offered to families who have singular or multiple needs. The school works well with partners to respond to local community issues and needs identified at strategic locality groups.
- Families would now benefit from having regular opportunities to discuss their learning and development with staff. This might include setting appropriate targets for the family as a whole or individual learners, which are then reviewed and evaluated.
- Parents are supported well to actively and meaningfully engage in their children's learning and life at school. Digital platforms and social networking sites are used as an effective platform to share with parents the learning undertaken within the school. Responding to consultation with parents/carers, opportunities for parents to meet and discuss children's care and learning with key workers have been increased in frequency to monthly meetings throughout the year. Well attended Family Learning Days provide additional opportunities for parents/carers to learn alongside children. Parents report that these experiences are helping them to better understand how they can support their children's learning in early literacy and numeracy and health and wellbeing. The work on these days also contributes to increasing parental expectations of their children.
- Senior leaders and practitioners are alert to the needs and potential barriers to participation in family learning of individual parents/carers. They work in partnership with other services to sensitively support individual parents/carers to enable them to support their children's learning.
- Working with community learning and development (CLD) the nursery has in recent years provided opportunities for family learning about health and parenting. This has included programmes such as Little Chef, Big Chef, wellbeing through a bespoke GIRFEC programme and the Solihull approach for parents. These programmes have been very well received by parents.
- There is scope for senior leaders and partners to use available data, analysis and intelligence to inform their understanding of community and individual family needs. This

has the potential to ensure appropriate timely interventions so that families are matched into the right programmes that address identified needs.

- The school could now build on the positive relationships that have been established with families to begin to focus on the quality of family learning programmes. Participation in family learning courses should be monitored robustly to highlight trends to support effective early intervention strategies.
- Overall, there is now a need to develop a holistic understanding of what is meant by family learning. Developing and taking a shared approach from the nursery to the end of P7 is needed to ensure families are supported to secure better outcomes for children.

## 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.

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