Summarised inspection findings

Strathesk Primary School

Midlothian Council

10 September 2024

Key contextual information

Strahesk Primary School is a non-denominational school with a nursery class in the town of Penicuik in Midlothian. Two hundred and twenty one children attend the school and are taught across 12 classes. Forty nine children attend the Early Learning Centre (ELC). The school supports transition arrangements for both Penicuik High School and Beeslack Community High School. Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas 3 and 4. Around one third of children have additional support needs or require extra help to make progress in their learning. There is an enhanced learning class which supports children who have additional support needs and attend the school. The enhanced class is supported by the depute headteacher and two learning assistants.

The headteacher has been in post for three years and is supported by a depute headteacher and four teachers who share principal teacher responsibilities. Two principal teachers also share the role of depute headteacher for part of each week.

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 school has a calm, welcoming ethos which is underpinned by the 'Strathesk Way' approach to promoting positive relationships. This is ensuring that most learners are ready to, 'Be Safe, Be Respectful and Be Ready to learn'. Relationships between staff and children, and among children, are positive. In each class, staff and children have worked together to create class charters. These help children to understand their rights and the rights of others. Almost all children behave well. A minority of children receive individual and small group support in the 'SNUG' enhanced classroom to support their learning and wellbeing. This is improving their engagement and readiness to learn.

■ In almost all lessons, teachers share the purpose of learning and highlight what children need to do to be successful. In a few lessons, children help identify their steps to success. As a result, children know what they are learning and why. Most teachers use questioning effectively to check children's understanding. In the best examples, teachers use questioning to extend and challenge children's thinking. Staff have developed a guide which details a variety of strategies for effective questioning. Teachers should now use this helpful guidance consistently across all lessons.

■ Most teachers deliver well-structured lessons and provide children with clear instructions and explanations. Most learners engage in tasks set in whole-class lessons. In a few lessons, children's learning is overly teacher-led and the pace of learning is too slow. Teachers should continue to develop opportunities for children to lead their own learning and ensure tasks are set at the right level of difficulty for all learners. This will help meet the learning needs of all

children better. The majority of teachers use the 'Strathesk Toolkit' to link skills to learning. This useful framework outlines key skills children develop across the curriculum. This is beginning to help children understand the skills they are developing and how they can apply these skills in a range of contexts.

- Teachers have engaged in professional development around specific aspects of learning and teaching, such as the format of an effective lesson. This includes the use of plenaries. As a result, teachers now use whole-class plenary sessions well to support children to evaluate their skills, celebrate successes and discuss next steps in learning. Teachers and support staff work very well together to ensure they support all children to make their best progress. Support staff have undertaken professional learning which is enabling them to deliver targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy for identified children. This helps ensure most children are engaged positively in their learning.

- Most teachers provide effective verbal feedback during lessons. As a result, children understand better how well they have achieved a set task. In most writing lessons, teachers provide effective written feedback to children to identify strengths and create targets for next steps in learning. Senior leaders should now work with teachers to develop a more consistent approach to the use of written feedback across all curricular areas. This will support children to be clearer on what they need to do next to improve further and how to make these improvements.

- In most lessons, teachers use digital technology creatively to support children's learning. All children have a digital device which they use confidently in class. Children access a wide range of tools and applications to enhance their learning. Children who benefit from additional support for learning use a range of software well within lessons to support their understanding. All children engage in high-quality digital learning experiences delivered by a specialist teacher. For example, younger children use programmable toys to learn about the language of position and direction. Children across the school use digital technology well to create bar graphs, pie charts and spreadsheets in a range of contexts. Children share their learning proudly with parents and carers through digital presentations at parent evenings. As planned, teachers should continue to build their own confidence and skills in the use of digital technology through professional learning.

- At early level, teachers are developing play pedagogy. They work collegiately to design play spaces, track and observe learners and evaluate the success of child directed play. Teachers provide engaging learning opportunities and support children to become more independent learners. They should continue to develop their understanding of play pedagogy to extend further children's literacy and numeracy skills and raise attainment. This should include an appropriate balance of adult-directed, adult-initiated and child-initiated activities.

- Most children enjoy stimulating outdoor learning activities. This is providing children with creative and adventurous learning experiences. Teachers plan effective outdoor learning events in partnership with community agencies throughout the year. For example, a productive partnership with the local woodland ranger is making effective use of the local environment to enhance children's learning. This supports children at first level to develop their map-reading skills through engaging in orienteering tasks. Children across the school apply skills and problem-solving strategies in real-life contexts through these engaging outdoor learning experiences.

- Teachers are developing their use of a range of summative assessment approaches to evaluate children's progress in learning. These include assessments, such as the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. Teachers are also developing their use of formative

assessment strategies. This is helping teachers benchmark children's progress and plan future learning. The majority of teachers make good use of high-quality assessments to assess how well children apply a range of skills and knowledge in new and familiar contexts.

■ The headteacher has recently introduced a new approach to medium and long-term planning across all curriculum areas. As a result, there is a more consistent approach to planning across the school. All teachers now plan learning more effectively using the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). They share information well with each other across stages. Teachers use the local authority progressive pathways for literacy and numeracy well. As a result, they are now more able to check children's progress as they move through CfE levels. Teachers need to ensure they plan effectively to meet the needs of a few children who require to be challenged further in their learning. Staff should now develop further approaches to involve children more in planning their own learning.

■ Senior leaders meet regularly with teachers to discuss children's attainment based on assessments and their professional judgements. Teachers are developing approaches to moderation. They have met with schools within their associated schools' group to moderate children's writing. Teachers should continue to engage in moderation activities to further develop confidence in their professional judgements about children's attainment across all curricular areas. Senior leaders use a school tracking system which provides useful information about the attainment of individual children and year groups. This includes children who have barriers to their learning and identified cohorts, for example young carers and children who are negatively impacted by their socio-economic circumstances. As a result of this approach, senior leaders identify promptly children who require further support with their learning. Senior leaders and teachers now need to record and evaluate, at key points, the impact of interventions, including those funded by Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), for all children. This will provide useful information for staff to identify appropriate next steps to help ensure positive progress in all children's learning.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

■ The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement	satisfactory

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

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

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

■ Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. The majority of children are on track to achieve expected CfE levels in reading and writing. Most are on track to achieve expected CfE levels in numeracy and listening and talking. Across the school, a few children are exceeding national levels in literacy and numeracy.

■ The majority of children who receive additional support for their learning make good progress against their individual targets for learning. A minority are on track to achieve nationally expected CfE levels.

Attainment in literacy and English

■ Overall, the majority of children are making satisfactory progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

■ At early level, most children use appropriate body language when listening to others and answer teachers' questions relevantly. At first level, most children engage positively with each other and listen well to instructions. They answer questions appropriately. Most children at second level work cooperatively and respectfully with each other. The majority of children offer their views confidently and are beginning to justify their opinions. At all stages, children require more frequent experiences to talk and present to larger, diverse audiences. This would develop children's confidence in their talking and listening skills further.

Reading

■ The majority of children at early level blend letter sounds together to read unfamiliar and tricky words. They hear and say patterns in words and the different single sounds made by letters. At first level, the majority of children read with fluency and expression. They share their favourite books and make inferences from texts read. A minority of children are not clear about the difference between fact and opinion. The majority of children at second level recognise techniques such as skimming, scanning, predicting, clarifying and summarising. They are confident in explaining their preferences for particular types of text and authors, supporting their ideas well with evidence. At second level, the majority of children need to build their confidence to read aloud within a small group.

Writing

■ At early level, the majority of children use capital letters and full stops appropriately in their writing. They are beginning to use their knowledge of phonics to spell unfamiliar words. At first level, the majority of children start sentences in a variety of ways to engage the reader. The majority of children spell familiar words correctly. They now need to present their work neatly and to use punctuation appropriately in their writing. At second level, the majority of

children write for a variety of purposes, including persuasive and procedural writing. The majority of children use key features appropriate to the genre to structure their writing. Across the school, most children need to apply their literacy skills by writing more extended texts, developing further their knowledge of appropriate styles and use of language.

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

Number, money and measure
■ At early level, most children confidently read analogue and digital o'clock times and sequence the days of the week. The majority recognise coins to 20p and find simple change. At first level, the majority of children round to the nearest 10 and 100 and compare fractions confidently. They use a variety of coins and notes to pay for items and give change within £10. At second level, the majority of children understand the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages. Most children successfully convert 12-hour and 24-hour times accurately. At first and second levels, children should continue to develop their ability to apply their knowledge of number processes to word problems and real-life contexts.

Shape, position and movement
■ At early level, most children have a positive understanding of positional language. They name and describe some properties of three-dimensional objects. At first level, the majority of children identify a right angle and confidently use compass points to provide directions. They would benefit from developing their understanding and use of grid references. At second level, most children identify and classify a range of angles. They successfully use the eight compass points to describe, follow and record directions. Children should build confidence in using the correct mathematical vocabulary to describe the properties of three-dimensional objects.

Information handling
■ At early level, most children create pictorial displays to present data. The majority interpret successfully simple graphs to retrieve information. At first level, the majority of children display and interpret data using bar graphs and charts. At second level, most children identify confidently ways to display data effectively using digital technology. They enter data into spreadsheets accurately, select data types and calculate profit and loss successfully. Children at first and second levels require more opportunities to improve their skills in analysing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from a range of increasingly complex data sets.

Attainment over time
■ Senior leaders track data over time. They gather data in reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy. Data provided by the school demonstrates accurately that overall, a majority of children in literacy and most in numeracy are making satisfactory progress over time.

■ The headteacher correctly identified that attainment in writing across the school is an area that has not been as positive as other areas. Staff are employing a variety of interventions to raise attainment in writing. For example, using model texts to introduce children to a range of different text types and providing support for children to plan their writing effectively. There are early signs of improvement as children progress from previous levels of understanding. It is too early to measure the full impact of interventions on attainment within CfE levels.

■ Senior leaders recognise the need to establish better processes to make more effective use of evidence and data to monitor children's attainment. They should now analyse all approaches and interventions carefully to determine which are providing the most effective results. This will provide useful information for staff to shape and adapt interventions to help

ensure that they impact positively on children's progress and attainment. All staff should continue to work together to raise attainment across all areas of the curriculum.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

■ Certificates are awarded weekly to children who demonstrate key skills of 'The Strathesk Toolkit'. Children's achievements, both in and out of school, are recognised and celebrated at assemblies. This is helping to build children's confidence and self-esteem. Primary 6 and Primary 7 children enjoy experiences provided through the John Muir Award. This is supporting them to learn about nature and how to help the environment. Children enjoy taking part in activities in clubs such as art, choir and gardening. These activities are helping to develop children's creative and artistic skills.

■ A minority of children across the school participate in pupil leadership activities. For example, groups that lead on rights based-learning, environmental issues and learners' participation. They work collaboratively to plan improvements. This is developing their skills in leadership, teamwork and communication. Children across Primary 6 and Primary 7 have responsibilities as Junior Road Safety Officers, buddies, prefects and House Captains. Most children feel that their voice is listened to and acted upon.

■ Staff are at the early stages of monitoring children's participation in wider achievement experiences. They now need to identify clearly gaps in children's participation and take action to address these. As planned, staff should link children's achievements both in and out of school to skills development. This will support children to understand better the range of skills they are developing for learning, life and work.

Equity for all learners

■ Senior leaders are vigilant in tracking the attendance of all children. They act promptly where individual children's attendance dips. Staff work closely with parents, partners, and the school's Home-School Practitioner to address the reasons for absence. Staff follow local authority guidance. Whilst overall levels of attendance are currently below local authority averages, bespoke arrangements that staff put in place are leading to success for a few children. As a result, attendance is beginning to show signs of improvement. Senior leaders make effective use of an information leaflet for parents to highlight and celebrate attendance and punctuality. It also describes the negative impact that non-attendance can have on children's engagement in learning.

■ The headteacher and staff have an in-depth understanding of the social, economic and cultural background of children. They are sensitive to the increasing financial pressure on children and their families. Staff are supporting families' wellbeing with discretion and sensitivity. The Home-School Practitioner organises helpful drop-in sessions for families to provide useful advice and to signpost further support. Senior leaders use funding appropriately to offset the cost of a variety of trips and activities to ensure no child is at risk of missing out.

■ Senior leaders and teachers monitor closely the progress of individuals and groups of children. This includes those who may require additional support, such as those who are young carers or disadvantaged by poverty. They have prioritised the use of PEF to support children's readiness to learn. As a result of interventions which promote children's emotional wellbeing, the majority of children supported by PEF are more engaged in their learning. Senior leaders should now use this data more effectively to evidence clearly the impact of interventions on children's attainment. This should help them measure the effectiveness of interventions in accelerating progress in closing identified gaps in children's learning.

Other relevant evidence

■ The school submitted information relating to compliance with the revised Nutritional Regulations 2020 and key duties as required by The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007. The Health and Nutrition Inspector (HNI) discussed this information with relevant staff and children. In addition, the HNI examined documentation relating to the effectiveness of whole school approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of children through food in school. A few areas for improvement have been agreed with the school and the private before and after school provider.

■ The school provides children with regular and important opportunities to participate in healthy physical activities, such as bikability. Senior leaders should review timetables to ensure all children receive two hours of quality Physical Education each week.

■ Children across the school learn French and Spanish in line with the 1+2 approach to Modern languages.

■ Senior leaders consult parents, pupils and staff on how to invest Pupil Equity Funding. This is helping to ensure appropriate use of allocated funds.

■ Children across the school access regularly a school library. In addition, every classroom has an inviting reading area. This is helping to promote children's reading for enjoyment.

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.