

Summarised inspection findings

Bun-sgoil Àth-Tharracail

Acharacle Primary School

The Highland Council

14 March 2023

Key contextual information

Bun-sgoil Àth-Tharracail - Acharacle Primary School is a small rural school offering Gaelic and English Medium Education. Almost all children enrol in Gaelic Medium Education. At the time of the inspection, the numbers learning through English is small and operates from P3 to P7. The headteacher is a cluster head for Bun-sgoil Àth-Tharracail - Acharacle Primary School and a neighbouring school. The school and nursery have experienced significant recruitment challenges for teaching and non-teaching staff. The headteacher and The Highland Council have been creative and introduced incentives to fill vacancies on both a short- and long- term basis. Many of these approaches were to protect total immersion at the early stages. A few staff have recently been appointed. As a result of these challenges, the headteacher has been teaching. She also has not had administrative assistance.

In 2022, the school met the target of providing at least 120 minutes of physical education to all children.

Attendance is above the national average. There are no cases of exclusion.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very 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

- Bun-sgoil Àth-Tharracail - Acharacle Primary School has a very warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos. This is conducive to learning through Gaelic and English. Children, staff, parents and partners enjoy nurturing and supportive relationships. The headteacher and staff are dedicated to the Gaelic language, culture and heritage of the local school community. Children and staff are very proud of their school. They share their story, successes and achievements in a wide range of ways, including by using technology, animation and performing skills.
- Children have very clear rights. They are very motivated from how their views are acted upon within the classroom and whole-school setting. Children are developing well as confident and responsible citizens who are polite, kind and respectful to each other and to adults. Staff are taking forward a rights-based approach with external accreditation.
- Children learn in a rich range of high-quality experiences in the classroom, outdoors and in the community. This is underpinned by children and staff's shared vision and values in pursuit of high-quality learning outcomes for all children. Children contribute very effectively to the life of the school and wider community through valuable leadership roles. These roles include being prefects, Tosgaire Spòrs (sports ambassadors), Oifigear Sàbhailteachd (safety officers), and Oifigear Earbsach (responsible responders). Children are active participants in improvement groups, such as Enterprise and Eco Committees and in organising whole-school events. Children develop key skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication and organisational skills. The majority of children participate in the local Mòd. Children can access tuition in a commendable range of instruments from established local musicians. This is organised by the

Fèis nan Garbh Chrìochan. Almost all children take part in sports for enjoyment, as well as to compete, with success, in local and national competitions in shinty, rugby, football and athletics.

- Across the school, almost all children interact very well in multi-stage group tasks, while also working very well independently. Most children understand the purpose of their learning. Children exercise some choice in their learning, such as suggesting topics and themes that interest them and in how they consolidate their learning. Across the school, each child has a digital device, which most use very well for a range of purposes. Children create and edit videos to evidence their learning. Children use technology to help them, such as voice type to support their writing. Staff and children continue their effective use of a digital platform and software packages from learning at home during the pandemic. This is increasing parents' engagement with their children's learning. Parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the school.
- The headteacher and staff show very strong leadership of total immersion, which results in children's high confidence in using Gaelic. Teachers are skilled in using a range of immersion approaches. They integrate music, culture, technology, sport, the local area and language to develop children's strong sense of identity with Gaelic. Teachers adapt other pedagogies to that required for effective learning, teaching and assessment for Gaelic Medium Education. Children in English Medium Education also experience high-quality interactive learning of Gaelic as an additional language. Teachers apply relevant findings from educational research to develop a whole-school approach. This is impacting positively on children's progress in language skills, reading and writing in both English and Gaelic, for example. Staff should continue capturing their approaches to immersion and Gaelic (Learners) across all their policies, the curriculum rationale, vision, values and aims to support evaluating further their practice.
- Across both mediums, staff explanations and instructions are clear. Staff plan lessons and tasks appropriately to provide differentiation, support and challenge for most children. They plan experiences across the four contexts of learning to assist children to meet the four capacities. They set well-defined purposes for learning and, in almost all cases, set a brisk pace for children in completing tasks. Staff's questioning develops children's understanding and confidence. They observe children closely to identify and plan for all individual needs. Children receive regular feedback from staff. This is increasingly helping children to know themselves well as learners and what they must do to improve.
- Staff are increasing their regular use of the school's outdoor environment to help children apply their learning. There is potential to develop further play-based and outdoor approaches by utilising further the free flow access to a secure area from all classrooms. At the early level, staff are increasing total immersion play to support children's fluency in Gaelic.
- Assessment is integral to the planning of learning and teaching. Teachers use a variety of assessment evidence to support their professional judgements and plan for next steps. In most cases, teachers ensure that assessment approaches are matched sufficiently to the individual learning needs of children. Staff are embedding strategies for self-, peer- and teacher-assessment. As a result, most children are aware of their individual targets. Children's breadth of learning is captured regularly in online learning journals. These are shared with parents.
- Staff have undertaken The Highland Council's assessment and moderation training. They engage very well in moderation activities with colleagues across the cluster. Staff should continue with their plans to extend further moderation across a wider network of schools for Gaelic Medium. Over time, staff worked collaboratively across the cluster on moderation of

pre-assessment tasks in numeracy, listening and talking, and reading. Within the school, staff work collaboratively, sharing informal and formal assessment practices. Moderation for this session is focusing on planning assessment of writing.

- Teachers make effective use of helpful local authority progression frameworks when assessing children's progress across the curriculum. They make good use of diagnostic information from Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) for literacy and English. Teachers have reintroduced national standardised assessments for literacy and Gàidhlig (MCNG) following a two-year gap in their availability. Teachers also use other standardised assessments to support their professional judgement, along with ongoing formative assessment.
- Teachers make very effective use of the school's own detailed systems for checking children's progress. The headteacher and staff monitor children's progress throughout the school year. As a result, all staff have a shared overview of the progress of all children across the school for literacy (English and Gàidhlig), numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

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

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

- At the time of the inspection, there were children at only some of the stages in English Medium Education. Over time, the numbers in Gaelic Medium Education have grown but individual classes may be small. Because of this profile, attainment and progress at times are expressed in 'overall' statements, rather than for specific year groups or Curriculum for Excellence levels.
- Overall, attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig and numeracy and mathematics, through the medium of Gaelic and English, is good. Attainment in literacy and English is very good. Across mediums of learning, most children are achieving, or are on track to achieve, expected levels. Additionally, a few children are making very good progress, with others exceeding in some aspects of attainment. Overall, children's attainment is being raised. This includes for children who require support with their learning. Children in Gaelic Medium Education evidence their assessment, and progress attainment using fluent Gaelic and specialist language. In using a generic literacy progression framework, teachers should ensure that Benchmarks bespoke to literacy and Gàidhlig are achieved.

Attainment in literacy and Gàidhlig and, as appropriate to statutory guidance, literacy and English in Gaelic Medium

Listening and talking

- All children in Gaelic Medium Education are making very good progress in their understanding of Gaelic. By the end of the second level, children are making very good progress in listening and talking in both languages. At the total immersion and early stages, children convey their understanding largely by responding to Gaelic communication in English. These children are increasing their use of Gaelic in familiar routines. By the end of the first and second levels, children are confident in their use of Gaelic to socialise, entertain and as their language of learning. They do this in small groups and while performing to large audiences. Children sing a range of songs from memory to support their language. They apply the language and grammar from songs accurately to other situations.

Reading

- Most children are making good progress in reading, with children in C5 (classes in Gaelic Medium Education are abbreviated to C, for instance C1) to C7 Gaelic Medium Education doing so in two languages. Most children read well with fluency. They could use more expression. Children are increasingly secure in features of different types of texts and share views on structure, character and setting of novels. Across stages, children retell stories very well from picture prompts.

Writing

- In both Gaelic and English, children write a range of quality texts very well across all their learning and in real-life contexts. Children contribute well to talking activities that stimulate their thoughts on what to write. They spell frequently used words accurately in two languages. By C7, children have good skills in notetaking through the medium of Gaelic. They take notes accurately at a fast pace. Children have targets to improve their writing. These should be extended to include targets on grammar for Gaelic.

Attainment in literacy and English in English Medium and additional findings for Gaelic Medium Education

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and English, as relevant to immersion, is very good. Almost all children are achieving or are on track to achieve expected levels. Almost all children in P4, C7 and P7 are making good progress in listening and talking, reading and writing.

Listening and talking

- Overall, children are making very good progress in listening and talking. Almost all children listen well during lessons and in set activities. They show a good understanding of real-life content listened to and can answer questions well. They readily engage in conversation with adults and peers during learning and respond respectfully to others' ideas. A few children require support to share their views during group tasks.

Reading

- Overall, children are making very good progress in reading English, as appropriate to their stage of immersion. They regularly select texts for enjoyment, or to find information for a specific purpose. Children access independently a nearby library. Children use a mobile library van that calls at the school, as well as the school's libraries. There are much fewer audio and written resources for children to access in Gaelic. At first level, all children in English Medium read fluently. They confidently discuss characters, setting and summarise the main ideas from a known text. At second level, children by P7 and C7 can read fluently, with understanding and expression, using appropriate pace and tone. P7 can identify and discuss writer's style, use of language and the effect it has on the reader.

Writing

- Overall, children are making very good progress in writing. Across the school, children write for a variety of purposes. At first level, most children in English Medium write well across a range of genre. They use vocabulary to engage the reader and organise their writing using paragraphs. At second level, most children in English and Gaelic Medium Education continue to write well across a range of genre, with accurate spelling. They can write at length and are able to use increasingly complex sentences. A few children use a wider range of punctuation to capture and maintain the readers' interest.

Numeracy and mathematics through the medium of Gaelic and English

- Overall, attainment in numeracy and mathematics is good. Almost all children in P1, P4 and P7 are making appropriate progress towards early, first or second level in numeracy, with a few exceeding. The pace of learning at the early level would benefit from being a bit brisker.

Number, money and measure

- Across the school, children develop their understanding of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division appropriate to their stage. At the early level, most children are using the numbers 0-10 in counting, representing quantities and in addition processes. They are developing a good understanding of money and time through play. They can continue a simple pattern using objects. At first and second levels, most children demonstrate brisk mental agility appropriate for their stage. They use their understanding of place value to perform calculations. Most children carry out calculations confidently and accurately. They explain their strategies. At first level, most children confidently round to the nearest 10 and 100, convert between pounds and

pence and can apply estimation skills well. They are not yet confident in working with fractions and percentages. At the second level, most children are developing confidence when working with fractions, decimals and percentages. They have good strategies for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers and decimal fractions. A few children exceeding second level can work out algebraic area and identify significant numbers. They are learning about financial education, such as the differences between debit and credit cards and working within a budget.

Shape, position and movement

- Children working at the early level can recognise and use common two-dimensional shapes to make pictures. They recognise three-dimensional objects. At the first level, most children describe well the properties of simple two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects. They recognise symmetrical pictures and designs. Most children at second level can name a range of angles and use coordinates to describe the location of a point on a grid.

Information handling

- At the early level, children can answer simple questions from charts, diagrams and tables to extract information. They are prioritising their development of Gaelic fluency. They are yet to develop skills relating to data and analysis. At the first level, most children can construct and display information in a bar graph. At the second level, most children can extract information from a collection of data, can construct different graphs and a few can use pie charts. There is scope for children to continue to apply their information-handling skills across different contexts for learning to ensure depth, challenge and application.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher and staff track individual children's progress in numeracy, and literacy through Gaelic and English. They are also capturing some aspects of progress across all curriculum areas by recording observations in learning journals. This progress is aligned to Curriculum for Excellence levels. Staff have over time been proactively using strategies to raise attainment. Data provided by the school demonstrates that staff have maintained good standards of attainment for most children over the last three years. Staff have worked very well to achieve this during challenges in recruiting staff. The headteacher and staff identified that children's attainment declined post-pandemic, with talking and writing in Gaelic being particularly impacted.
- Teachers are now ready to increase their checking of children's progress and expectations in Gaelic (Learners). Currently, children are making promising progress with personal language and language for performance, for example in singing songs. Children should be encouraged to make more accelerated progress towards meeting the national expectation that they achieve the second level outcomes of Gaelic (Learners) by P7.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children participate very well in rich opportunities for achievements. These are celebrated using a range of very suitable approaches within the school, and with external recognition, for example Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag. The headteacher tracks opportunities beyond the school. Children engage very well with learning through sports and in the outdoors, while supporting their wellbeing. This develops their attachment to their local environment. Children take care of their environment through opportunities such as the Eco-Committee. Their activities are customised to their local area, such as cutting bracken to support the environment. Children learn about the history and traditions of the area through meaningful use of traditional, local, Gaelic songs and culture. This also develops their local dialect and vocabulary. There is a contemporary element to their skills for Gaelic through performance, such as the Mòd, drama and cèilidhs. Children are beginning to connect opportunities to skills. They have adult role models who are employed in the school for their skills in Gaelic. While

skills are planned, it would be good to connect these further across the four contexts of learning. All children, both in Gaelic and English medium, should be encouraged to develop fluency in Gaelic as an essential skill.

Equity for all learners

- The headteacher and staff have a strong focus on equity and inclusion, while protecting the principles of immersion. They have a clear understanding of the socio-economic and rural backgrounds of all children and families. The headteacher has prioritised very well the use of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) to provide targeted support for individual children. A range of support through PEF is impacting on children's progress in total immersion, play-based learning, literacy and numeracy. Additionally, children are developing more resilience and confidence. Staff understand the impact of the pandemic and how the rising cost of living affects families. Parents also raise significant funds, which the headteacher uses to reduce the cost of the school day. The headteacher has used a range of creative ways to ensure that children's learning and immersion was sustained during significant challenges in recruiting staff. The headteacher needs continued support with tangible, coherent solutions to the recruitment and retention of staff for her school. This should also include ensuring that children who join the school later than P1 have accelerated ways of acquiring fluency in Gaelic. To increase access to music tuition, fèis tutors provide lessons in a commendable range of musical instruments. Delivering tuition during the day, rather than after school, is closing barriers for travel in a rural area.

Other relevant evidence

- The school uses a council school improvement plan template that requires planning to link to Gaelic Medium Education. Consideration should be given to planning being linked to all aspects of Gaelic. Given that the council has a statutory Gaelic Language Plan, this amendment would make better pathways for Gaelic Medium, Gaelic (Learners) and learning about Gaelic as a context.
- The school is making clear progress with the “Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.” They have set a catchment area bespoke to Gaelic. Staff are making 1140 hours of progressive early learning and childcare available through total immersion in Gaelic. The school and the council have adopted creative ways to recruit staff for Gaelic Medium Education. There is a need for a continued focus on securing and recruiting staff for the school.

Practice worth sharing more widely

- The headteacher and staff have made systematic and robust use of the “Advice on Gaelic Education” as a self-evaluation audit over time in the school. As a result, there has been steady and successful progress in increasing the numbers in Gaelic Medium Education. Almost all enrolments in the school are for Gaelic Medium Education. The headteacher and staff have a very strong understanding of the principles of immersion and how it is taken forward. The curriculum is developed to integrate music, culture, technology, sport, the local area and language to develop children’s strong sense of identity with Gaelic and their local area. Former pupils are returning to their school as teachers, and other valuable roles. Children in English Medium Education also experience some high-quality interactive learning of Gaelic as an additional language. Their progress has been interrupted by the pandemic. Teachers apply relevant findings from educational research to impact positively on children’s progress.

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.