

Summarised inspection findings

Bellsbank Primary School and Early Childhood Centre

East Ayrshire Council

19 November 2019

Key contextual information

At the time of the inspection, there were 102 children on the school roll, split across five classes. All children live within deciles one to three of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). As a result, the school was identified as a Scottish Attainment Challenge school in May 2016. A new school campus is currently under construction within the existing school grounds. The anticipated completion date for the new building is February 2020. A temporary school playground has been created to replace the ground lost to construction. This is limiting opportunities for outdoor learning within the school grounds at present.

1.3 Leadership of change

satisfactory

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 drive to achieve the school's vision of being 'a centre for excellence for learning which is a driving force for positive change across the community' is evident. The school community, including a wide range of partners, identify the headteacher as being the catalyst for positive change. Very highly respected by all stakeholders, the headteacher has successfully led the development of a nurturing, caring and inclusive environment. As a result of building capacity across the wider community, there is now increased engagement with parents. To realise fully the school's vision, much greater emphasis now needs to be placed on how this improves learning and improves outcomes for children.
- The school's core values of honesty, respect, responsibility, equality, inclusion, fairness and compassion underpin all aspects of the school's work. Children and staff can articulate and demonstrate how these influence the day-to-day life of the school. Developed eight years ago, the school has rightly identified the move to a new school campus as the ideal time to review the school's vision, values, aims and logo. As planned, this should be done in partnership with all stakeholders.
- Staff understand the social, economic and cultural context of the school. Senior leaders recognise the potential of using a broader range of data and information to inform further this understanding. This will support the school to develop its curriculum rationale, informed by the school's unique context.
- Identified as a challenge school within the Scottish Attainment Challenge in May 2016, parental engagement and empowerment have featured very strongly as a key development priority over the past three years. As a result of a range of projects, the school has increased considerably levels of parental engagement over that time. This includes the recent re-introduction of a Parent Council. Staff training, and the expansion of nurture provision across the whole school, supported by Pupil Equity Fund (PEF), is increasing children's levels of engagement in their learning. Measures that are more robust are now needed to demonstrate progress in increasing levels of engagement and participation over time. The school is now well placed to focus its attention on raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

- School improvement planning appropriately prioritises literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. Although some development work has been undertaken to implement more active approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy in line with these improvement priorities, these are not yet having a positive impact on raising attainment. The pace of change needs to be increased to ensure a relentless focus on raising attainment.
- Approaches to quality assure the work of the school are developing. Releasing the principal teacher from class has enhanced the capacity of the senior leadership team to undertake more regular quality assurance activities. Building on this positive start, senior leaders should continue to develop the effectiveness of these activities to ensure the provision of high quality learning and teaching across the school.
- Most staff engage in self-evaluation activities using 'How good is our school? (4th edition)'. This informs professional dialogue, which is used to identify development priorities. Evidence provided by the school in relation to these self-evaluation activities identifies the need for further development in this area. Continuing to become more outward looking will support senior leaders and staff to reflect on their practice in a more informed and accurate way. This should include further participation in moderation activities with other schools to develop a shared understanding of standards. There is scope to develop further the involvement of parents and partners in a range of self-evaluation activities.
- Senior leaders recognise the need to continue to develop their use of data, including supporting staff to become more data literate. The new system introduced this session, building on previous work to track children's progress, is beginning to support this. Greater rigour is required to enable the school to identify clearly its effectiveness in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. By monitoring the progress of identified cohorts of children, senior leaders will be able to use this data in a more informed and strategic way to support school improvement.
- Most children feel that their views are taken into account. Some children have opportunities to play a role in leadership groups, such as Right Respecting Schools, and as Junior Road Safety Officers. We have discussed with the school ways in which children could contribute more fully to the leadership of change. There is scope for leadership opportunities for children to be increased across the school.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school. Distributed leadership continues to be developed. The introduction of a teacher learning community this session is supporting teachers to develop a shared understanding and consistent approach in relation to metacognition. Professional learning is addressing the needs of individual staff and the needs of the school improvement plan. All staff should ensure that professional learning is having the desired impact on improving outcomes for children.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

satisfactory

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 dedicated school team has worked hard to create a child-centred environment where almost all children feel safe and secure. This is underpinned by an understanding of children's rights. Children are polite and treat each other with respect. In all classes, staff use praise appropriately to promote nurturing, caring relationships, and to improve children's self-esteem. Standards of behaviour in all classes are high. In the best examples of learning, where children's needs and interests are met, children are highly motivated and engaged. A range of strategies is being used well to build children's resilience in learning. This includes children being actively encouraged to develop self-confidence when they meet challenging tasks.
- As a result of almost all lessons being overly teacher led, children are passive in their learning. This is limiting opportunities for children to become independent, to lead learning and to work cooperatively with others. The majority of children told us that they are asked about choices in learning. They enjoy sharing their learning with their parents. For example, a workshop about the Vikings enabled children and parents to engage in writing activities together. The school recognises the need to develop further children's understanding of themselves as learners. This will support them to identify their strengths and what they need to do to improve. All children have targets to support their writing, with some children benefitting from individualised learning targets. There is scope to expand this to include other areas of the curriculum.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In all classes, teaching is underpinned by the school's values. In most classes, teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. In the majority of lessons observed, teachers used questioning to support children to develop higher order thinking skills. Senior leaders recognise that children's learning experiences are not **yet** of a consistently high enough quality. When engaged in active tasks that promote cooperation, such as playing in the class string orchestra, children are highly focussed and engaged. Their level of enjoyment is evident in the pride they gain from their performance together. Children have occasional opportunities to use digital technology to support and enhance their learning. For example, when programming robots and research for writing activities. The school should continue with its plans to incorporate computer programming and coding as they increase the use of digital technology across learning, providing more motivating and engaging learning experiences.
- Staff are developing a play-based approach to learning at P1. This is increasing the opportunities for younger children to engage in appropriately differentiated and active learning experiences. The early years team should work together to evaluate the impact of this new development on continuity and progression in children's learning. Children enjoy opportunities to learn in other settings. A visit to Dumfries House supported younger children to learn first-hand about growing and cooking vegetables, while older children engaged in technology and science activities. Participation in an engineering competition provides an appropriate forum for children to present their work, thus developing their talking and listening skills.

Learning contexts such as these are also providing children with opportunities to develop key skills in learning, life and work. Moving forward, senior leaders should support staff to develop a shared understanding of what high quality learning and teaching at Bellsbank Primary School looks like.

- Across the school, teachers use a variety of assessment approaches to inform children's progress. This includes a range of summative, standardised and diagnostic assessments. Staff use this information to plan learning for children. While this is not yet forming an integral role in effectively supporting learning and teaching, almost all children believe that staff help them to understand how they are progressing in their work. The school has correctly identified the need for children to develop further skills in peer and self- assessment as they become more independent learners. The majority of children also believe that their learning could be more challenging. Classroom observations, and discussion with children, confirmed the need to increase the levels of pace and challenge across the school. By using assessment information in a systematic way, teachers will be able to plan more effectively next steps in learning. We have asked the staff to continue to review approaches to differentiation to ensure their appropriateness for children's age and stage of development. The school should continue to develop its approaches to assessment in order to ensure that a wide range of evidence is gathered to show breadth, challenge and application of learning across Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels.
- Teachers take part in moderation activity within the school, where they are beginning to develop confidence in making professional judgements about achievement of a level. To improve the effectiveness of these activities staff should look outwards to practice in other schools. Working with external colleagues will strengthen further their understanding of the moderation cycle and assessment process. This will serve to improve the robustness of professional judgements in relation to National Benchmarks.
- Senior leaders recognise the need to monitor children's progress, and the quality of learning and teaching, more frequently and rigorously. As part of a revised quality assurance programme, termly 'pace and challenge' meetings between senior leaders and teachers have been introduced. More time is needed for these meetings to ensure that planned learning meets the needs of all children and raises attainment. Procedures to monitor and track progression in literacy and numeracy have been introduced in the last two years, with the school currently transitioning to a new local authority system. There is scope to extend this further to include other curricular areas. The school should continue with its plans to improve approaches to planning, tracking and monitoring the progress of children in their learning.
- Some children with particular barriers to learning benefit from effective individualised support. Individual learning plans are in place for children who require additional support. The quality of this planning should be reviewed so that targets are always clearly aligned to assessed need and linked to improvement in children's skills in order to measure progress. Approaches to providing additional support for children should continue to be reviewed in keeping with the school's inclusive ethos.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- The school's curriculum rationale is underpinned by the school's values. Although this reflects the school's unique context, there is scope to strengthen this further. Preparing to move to the new school campus next session provides an ideal opportunity to revisit the curriculum rationale to ensure it supports the school to raise attainment. This should be done in partnership with all stakeholders, taking due account of national guidance.
- Progression pathways for all areas of the curriculum need to be developed to enable staff to plan flexible pathways to meet the needs of all children and raise attainment. Although staff are tracking coverage of experiences and outcomes, there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of curricular progression. Taking due account of national guidance, senior leaders should support staff to develop this shared understanding.
- To ensure inter-disciplinary learning (IDL) supports the delivery of identified curriculum areas in a planned and progressive way, further development of IDL is needed. Staff should be supported to develop a clearer understanding of IDL to ensure appropriate progression in learning. This will increase opportunities for children to learn and apply skills and knowledge in more meaningful contexts. For example, we discussed with staff the potential of the new school building as a means for taking this forward.
- Children currently have some opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. For example, through visits to Dumfries House. Staff should explore further opportunities for partnerships with local businesses to enhance children's understanding of the world of work. The development of a skills framework will support the embedding of the Careers Education Standard (3 – 18).
- Outdoor learning could be a more prominent feature of the school curriculum. There is considerable scope to use the rich, rural landscape within the local community to support outdoor learning. Moving forward, staff should consider how the grounds within the new school campus, and within the local community, could be maximised to support outdoor learning experiences in a planned and progressive way.
- The school should ensure that it meets the national guidance for the development of teaching modern languages. Significant work needs to be undertaken, including agreement on the third language, to ensure that this is implemented in line with national expectations.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- See choice QI.

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. Areas for development have been agreed with the school and the education authority.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

satisfactory

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

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- Very positive relationships between children, and between staff and children, are evident across the school. Staff know children and their families very well. The headteacher actively promotes positive relationships across the school community. As a result, relationships with parents has been significantly enhanced. These relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. Almost all children, and parents, feel that the school encourages children to treat each other with respect. As a result, there is a 'family' feel across the school. This is impacting positively on the learning environment, with high standards of behaviour observed throughout inspection activities.
- All staff are committed to providing a nurturing, supportive school environment. The high priority given to supporting children's wellbeing is reflected in the nature of training provided to staff and in day-to-day practice. There is a shared understanding about adverse childhood experiences and trauma and the majority of staff are trained in nurture. This is enabling staff to support almost all children's emotional wellbeing very well. It is also informing approaches to behaviour management. Daily check-ins ensure that children feel valued and welcome on their arrival at school. Almost all children feel safe in school, and feel able to discuss personal and sensitive aspects of their life because they feel cared about.
- Most parents feel that the school supports their child's emotional wellbeing and feel comfortable about approaching the school if they have a problem. Regular school assemblies focus on reinforcing children's understanding of wellbeing and resilience. By promoting a 'right of the month', children are becoming more familiar with rights, and how these apply to them.
- All staff have an awareness and understanding of 'Getting it right for every child'. The majority of teachers have used the wellbeing indicators within their classes. Staff use wellbeing indicators effectively with a few children in a targeted way to assess their progress in relation to their wellbeing and inform planning. Building on these positive examples, senior leaders should consider how the use of the wellbeing indicators could be expanded further to include all children. This would support staff to develop a more robust understanding of the wellbeing across the school and enable them to track individual progress more effectively.
- Children attending the breakfast club benefit from a positive, calm, start to the school day. Facilitated by parent volunteers, children are provided with a healthy breakfast and a choice of activities. Staff understand the importance of promoting healthy eating and reinforce this in a variety of ways. For example, when developing their instructional writing skills, children described the process of making a healthy sandwich. Children have had experience of growing fruit and vegetables. There is potential to develop this further when the new school grounds are established.

- By improving the level of provision and training to support children with additional support needs, staff have successfully reduced levels of exclusion over the past few years. The headteacher recognises the need to continue to improve general levels of attendance. At the time of the inspection, the majority of children had attendance levels close to the national average, with the rest falling below that. Although significant progress has been made in relation to improving a few children's attendance, greater rigour is needed to improve this for all. Levels of absence in class were noticeable during the week of the inspection and this is impacting on teacher's ability to ensure continuity and progression in learning.
- In pre-inspection questionnaires, all children who have transitioned into the school felt well supported to settle in. The current development of play-based approaches at P1, in partnership with Early Childhood Centre staff, is serving to strengthen further transition processes for children as they move into P1. When children move from P7 to S1, they are well supported through a range of pastoral and curricular visits. This support has been enhanced through the provision of a very successful 'Family transitions leadership academy'. Attended by P7 children and their parents, participation in this project resulted in increased understanding and improved relationships for those involved.
- The school employs a range of universal and targeted approaches to support children's health and wellbeing development. For example, through its two very effective nurture class provisions, the 'brick club' and approaches to wellbeing through the medium of music. Internet safety is addressed through activities such as participation in 'internet safety day'. School assemblies help address the potential dangers arising from the construction works on the school campus.
- The lack of a clear progression framework for health and wellbeing is weakening the effectiveness of this aspect of the curriculum. We have asked staff to review how the totality of its health and wellbeing provision works together to provide progression that supports all children to develop the four capacities. Clear health and wellbeing progression frameworks should be developed.
- All classes receive two hours of physical education in line with national expectations. Children have very limited opportunity to engage in physical activity out with the formal curriculum. In partnership with external providers, senior leaders should seek to extend opportunities for physical activity.
- As a result of regular training, all staff are aware of, and implement, the school's policy and procedures in relation to child protection. There is a shared understanding of what is expected of them.
- We have asked the headteacher to ensure that school policies and practices are well grounded in current legislation. This includes the school's approach to religious observance. The content of the school handbook should be reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects national guidance and the work of the school.
- Inclusion is a key school value that underpins and permeates all aspects of the school's work. Staff and partners understand the socio-economic context of the school. Individual children have benefited from the nurture provision, transitioning successfully through to their mainstream class after intensive support. There is evidence of the powerful impact on the wider community of the parental empowerment programme.

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

Overall attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Data on achievement levels for session 2017/18 shows that, across the school, the majority of children made satisfactory progress overall in literacy and English, whilst their attainment in numeracy and mathematics was weaker. The school provided predicted levels of achievement for session 2018/19. At all stages of the school, significant numbers of children have identified additional support needs or barriers to their learning. The school's data shows that all children who require additional support are making progress from their prior levels of attainment.
- Inspection activity, including observation in classes, focus groups of children, analysis of data and sampling of children's work, confirms that class teacher professional judgment is not yet sufficiently robust. More rigorous approaches to moderation and assessment, including moderation activity with other schools, should be provided to support improved attainment and continue to raise expectations for all children. A greater understanding of breadth, challenge and application of learning in relation to the achievement of CfE levels should be developed. Teachers should use this increased understanding of national guidance to review the appropriateness of children working at third level.

Literacy and English

- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and English across the school is satisfactory.
- The school has made a number of recent changes in its approaches to raising attainment in literacy, including the introduction of active literacy approaches. Children have been surveyed on reading habits and new novels purchased in response to their requests. This is increasing children's enjoyment and enthusiasm for reading, but it is too early to assess the impact of these changes on children's attainment. Across the school, there is scope to develop a consistent and progressive approach to the development of literacy skills, and writing in particular.

Reading

- Overall, children's progress in reading is satisfactory.
- At early level, the majority of children can discuss the content of their reading books and use illustrations to support meaning. They use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read words. At first level, children can identify their favourite authors and state the purpose of a blurb and contents page. They can read aloud a familiar piece of text and can show understanding. They are not yet able to discuss experience of a range of genres. At second level, children are developing skills in researching information. They can confidently identify a range of strategies when faced with unfamiliar vocabulary.

Writing

- Overall, children's progress in writing is satisfactory
- At early level, children can write a simple sentence, using capital letters, use appropriate spacing and full stops. At first level, children show some knowledge of punctuation features and are beginning to apply this in their writing. At second level, children are developing skills in persuasive writing. Having identified the need to raise attainment in writing, a new programme to support the teaching of writing has been introduced. At the time of the inspection, it is too early to evidence the impact of this new approach on children's attainment.

Listening and talking

- Children's progress in listening and talking is satisfactory.
- Across the school, children are respectful to adults and to each other when talking. At early level, children can give simple responses to questions and share their views and opinions. They are able to take turns and show an increasing awareness of when to talk and when to listen. At first level, children can answer simple questions about different genres of text. They can listen and respond appropriately to others in a respectful way. At second level, children can talk about opportunities to present at whole school assemblies and participate in class debates, on subjects such as endangered animals. Across all levels, children would benefit from increased opportunities to work collaboratively, developing their listening and talking skills as they learn together and from each other. As staff plan increased opportunities for children to develop leadership skills, they should consider how these could be used as a context for the application of literacy skills.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children's progress in numeracy and mathematics is weak.

Number, money and measure

- Having recognised the need to raise attainment, more active approaches to supporting the development of numeracy skills have been introduced this session. These active approaches were evident in a few lessons. However, the impact on raising attainment has not yet been realised. Although opportunities for children to apply numeracy and mathematical learning across the curriculum are provided, there is scope to increase opportunities for learning in relevant, real-life contexts. Greater use could be made of digital technologies to support and extend learning.
- Across the school, there is scope to increase children's mental agility. At early level, the minority of children can add and subtract within 10. They can identify all coins, and use 1p, 2p, and 5p coins to make given amounts. At first level, less than half of children can count in 2's, 5's and 10's and divide by 10 and 100. At second level, the majority of children can order and simplify fractions. They can convert percentages to decimals.

Shape, position and movement

- At early and first levels, child are exploring the properties of 2D shapes and 3D objects. At second level, can describe the properties of these shapes, using specific vocabulary.

Information handling

- Around half of children can draw, analyse and interpret information appropriate to their stage. However, children's skills in information handling are not yet being developed through digital technologies. Teachers should revisit the National Benchmarks to ensure appropriate, balance and application of learning is achieved before progressing children on to the next level.

Attainment over time

- The school has identified the need to collate and analyse a wider range of data to support more effective monitoring and tracking of attainment and achievement. The school is making changes to the way staff can evidence improvements in attainment over time. A local authority tracking system is currently being introduced to address this. For the significant numbers of children requiring additional support, the interventions to overcome barriers to learning are based well on the school's detailed knowledge of individual children and their lives in the wider community. These cohorts of children are making progress in their learning as a result.

Overall quality of learners' achievement

- Children across P4 – P7 benefit from their participation in weekly lessons to learn stringed instruments. In partnership with the Royal Conservatoire, children learn the violin, cello and double bass. This is increasing their confidence, their ability to work together as an orchestra, and represent the school by performing at events.
- Children have the opportunity to contribute to the wider life of the school through their involvement in leadership groups, such as the Dyslexia Friendly School group, and as Junior Road Safety Officers. There is considerable scope to increase leadership opportunities across the school. Staff would benefit from looking at good practice in other schools to inform this development.
- Children's wider achievement is shared during class check-in time and at assemblies. Participation in wider achievement activities should be tracked to ensure that all children are developing the four capacities. This will support staff to ensure equity of access to wider-achievement opportunities.

Equity for all learners

- Equity for all learners lies at the heart of the school's values and the ethos of the school. An additional two early years practitioners and a teacher have been recruited to the whole school team as a result of PEF. This additional staffing has successfully supported a number of initiatives, including the Parent Empowerment Programme, the further development of a play-based approach in P1, and an upper nurture provision to provide a continuity of approach from P1 - P7. There are positive outcomes arising from these initiatives, particularly in relation to improving the engagement of parents in their child's learning. The school should monitor how such interventions contribute to raising attainment.
- The school is alert to the implications of the cost of the school day and takes appropriate action to reduce barriers to participation. For example, the school subsidises educational outings and provides specialist clothing.

Choice of QI: 2.7 Partnerships

- the development and promotion of partnerships
- collaborative learning and improvement
- impact on learners

- The school's work to support and empower parents is recognised and valued by them. Parents commend the efforts that the whole staff team and the headteacher in particular, make to ensure that effective, supportive relationships are in place. Parents now access literacy and numeracy workshops, organised as a result of the school's very effective partnership working with community learning and development colleagues.
- The impact of the school's vision to become '... a driving force for positive change across the community' is evident in the success of its Empowering Parents Programme. All of the school's partners who met with inspectors value this. The success of the work of the 'Continuous and never ending improvement group' (C.A.N.I.) was recognised nationally when it was awarded recognised as the winner of the 'My Place Award' by the Scottish Civic Trust. Parents have led on mindfulness sessions, now lead the breakfast club, volunteer in school and have set up a valued community youth club. Financial advice for parents is facilitated through this group. Planning is now for the establishment of a community hub. Parents credit the headteacher in particular for being the catalyst for improvements in community cohesion.
- Support for reading has been a particular focus with the introduction of DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) Fridays when parents attend for a reading event with their children. Parent friendly leaflets have been produced to encourage families to read together. Parents value the 'sharing the learning' sessions when parents work in class with their children on activities such as creating the Leaning Tower of Pisa models. Communication is mainly through a digital app that allows parents and carers to see at first hand, and support in a home setting, the learning that their children experience in the classroom. Next steps include engaging parents as key partners in the improvement work of the school.
- Partners are very positive about the work of the school and enjoy working with school staff. Senior leaders should explore opportunities that the partnership with the newly formed Parent Council can bring. There is considerable scope to work with them to inform school improvement.
- The impact of the strong community work is evident in improvements in relationships and learners' wellbeing. Senior staff should now focus on ensuring that the strengths within partnership working lead clearly to improved outcomes for children. Planned improvements now need to take place with an explicit focus on ensuring that this also leads to raised attainment and achievement.

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.