Summarised inspection findings

St Joseph's RC School

Aberdeen City Council

17 September 2024

Key contextual information

St. Joseph's RC School is a denominational primary school serving the city of Aberdeen and the surrounding area, including Aberdeenshire. Most children are from a minority ethnic background. Children join the school from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds, often for short periods of time. A minority of children reside in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles two to six. The current roll is 405 children across 14 classes. Thirty-two children attend the nursery class on a combination of morning and afternoon sessions. Children's attendance is currently at 95%. Over the past few years, this has remained consistently and substantially above the national average. The senior leadership team of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and a principal teacher, is well-established.

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

■ Children experience a very nurturing and inclusive ethos underpinned by the values of respect, honesty, forgiveness and equality. The school's ethos reflects a clear commitment to the Gospel Values, diversity and children's rights through individual class charters. Across the school community, all staff's interactions with children are very positive and caring. Children feel that they are treated with respect by staff and peers. They are encouraged to express their views and opinions.

■ Most children are motivated and engaged in their learning when they work independently, in pairs and in groups. In most lessons, children listen attentively to instructions and are confident to share their learning. Almost all staff create and maintain calm learning environments which are supportive and highly inclusive. In a few lessons, children become disengaged when learning is overly teacher led. This includes, for example, prolonged periods of listening to teacher explanations. Children show a positive attitude to learning and engage well in experiences across the curriculum. They are supportive of one another and understand where to get support if required.

■ Almost all staff ensure positive relationships underpin their response to behaviour and use the principles of emotional regulation to support children. They have worked well together and involved children fully in developing a relationships policy. This reflects the ethos of the rights of learners. Staff revisit this annually to respond to emerging needs. Where behaviour is a barrier to children's progress in learning, they are supported effectively by staff through individual child plans which identify triggers and strategies. The local authority provides targeted training for staff in areas such as de-escalation. Senior leaders have supported staff to improve the consistency in responding to children's behaviour. Staff respond calmly and ensure that children are supported well to improve their behaviour. As a result, the frequency of incidents has reduced significantly. Children access calm spaces in classrooms when necessary to self-regulate. In addition, they use hub spaces which contain resources to meet

specific emotional and behavioural needs. This leads to almost all children across the school displaying consistent and high standards of positive behaviour.

■ Led by the headteacher, teachers have developed a helpful learning and teaching policy which identifies features of effective practice. Teachers use this effectively to implement well considered and consistent approaches across the school. In almost all lessons, teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. Almost all teachers share the purpose of lessons and discuss the steps that children need to take to be successful. Across the school, children are now ready to be involved more fully in creating measures of success.

■ Almost all teachers use questioning effectively to check understanding. In a few classes, teachers use questioning skilfully to extend children's learning or support them to develop higher order thinking skills. Teachers would benefit from further opportunities to discuss and share this effective practice with each other.

■ In most lessons, teachers match learning experiences to children's needs well. Where this is most effective, children experience appropriate pace and challenge in their learning. This is not yet consistent across all lessons. Senior leaders and teachers should work together to ensure tasks and activities provide the correct level of challenge for all learners. This should help to ensure better outcomes for all children.

■ Children in P1 experience a range of regular opportunities to learn through play. Staff have worked together to develop their understanding of play pedagogy using national guidance. They use this learning well to create a blend of adult-initiated and child-led learning experiences. Teachers should continue to develop and share their understanding and approaches to play, taking account of national guidance. As they do so, they should focus on how effectively they use their learning spaces to create meaningful and motivating play experiences.

■ All teachers use digital technology, such as interactive screens, successfully to support class lessons. Children use digital devices confidently to play games to reinforce learning, undertake research and for word processing. Children are developing their understanding of computational thinking and coding using programmable devices and software. A few children use assistive tools well to access the curriculum and have appropriate support as they learn. As planned, teachers should continue to develop children's digital skills progressively to enrich learning across the curriculum.

■ In most classes, teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to children on their progress. The quality of written comments varies across the school. Senior leaders should review approaches to improve the consistency and quality of written feedback. Teachers should continue to refine their approaches to providing feedback to ensure it supports children's progress towards their next steps in learning.

■ In most classes, children are given opportunities by teachers to self and peer assess their work. This allows them to reflect on their learning regularly using the identified steps to success. Teachers have helpfully introduced target setting with children in a few classes. This is not yet a consistent feature across the school. Children should have more frequent opportunities to reflect on and review progress towards their targets. Teachers should now support children to build a learning profile using examples of their work to highlight where targets have been met. Children need to be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their own learning so that they understand better their progress as learners.

■ Teachers use a range of summative, standardised and diagnostic assessments to measure accurately children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. They use assessment information effectively to inform planning and to identify children's next steps in learning. Most teachers plan assessments which allow children to apply their learning in different contexts across all areas of the curriculum. Teachers should now develop this practice consistently across the school to ensure high quality assessment is integral to planning.

■ The senior leadership team have established clear processes which are leading to a more consistent approach to overall planning across the school. Teachers make effective use of progression pathway planners across all areas of the curriculum. Teachers use these effectively to support planning for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. In particular, this results in highly impactful learning and teaching approaches to maths and numeracy which are impacting positively on children's confidence, engagement, accuracy, and speed of numeracy calculations. Teachers work collaboratively in stage partnerships to plan appropriate and progressive learning experiences. Teachers have engaged in moderation activities across the school, and this has strengthened their understanding of children's progress. As planned, senior leaders should build on this positive approach by increasing opportunities for staff to work with colleagues in other schools.

■ Teachers' confidence has improved significantly in making sound judgements about children's achievement of a level. Senior leaders have supported this improvement through well-planned collegiate working. They have robust moderation processes in place and teachers are supported by rigorous internal and increasingly external verification approaches. As a result, attainment data is highly reliable. Senior leaders should continue with their plans to moderate learning, teaching and assessment with their associated school group.

■ Senior leaders meet with teachers termly to review assessments and discuss children's progress in learning. They use a whole school tracking system to record progress and to identify children who are on track, off track or exceeding expectations in their learning. Senior leaders ensure that interventions and support strategies are identified and agreed with teachers for children who require additional support. Senior leaders identify correctly that an important next step is to develop this approach further to track the progress of learners across all curriculum areas.

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	very 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

- The school roll fluctuates throughout the academic year. Children from other countries join the school, often for short periods of time. In addition, a significant number of children who enrol have English as an additional or new language. These factors have a considerable impact on the school's overall attainment data.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy
- Overall, children's attainment in literacy and numeracy is very good.

- Accurate attainment data provided by the school indicates that for the current session 2023-24, most children across the school are achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence levels in literacy and numeracy. A few children are consistently exceeding expected levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. There is potential for a few children to make greater progress.

- Most children who require support with learning, including those with English as an additional language, make very good progress from prior levels of attainment or towards their individual targets.

Attainment in literacy and English
- Overall, most children make good progress from prior levels of attainment in literacy and English. Across the school, a few children are exceeding expectations and are making very good progress.

Listening and talking
- At early and first levels, almost all children follow simple instructions. They listen and respond to others appropriately. They communicate confidently and share their ideas willingly. At second level, almost all children convey information confidently. They listen and respond appropriately in group discussions and build successfully on the ideas of others. Across the school, children should continue to develop techniques to engage listeners.

Reading
- At early level, most children use their knowledge of sounds, letters and patterns to read words and use sight vocabulary to read familiar words. Children would benefit from increased opportunities to choose stories and other texts for enjoyment. At first level, most children read fluently and discuss the main ideas of a text. Children should add further expression when reading aloud. At second level, most children read regularly for enjoyment and almost all explain their preferences for texts and authors. Almost all children respond to a range of increasingly challenging questions to demonstrate their understanding of texts. They require more opportunities to develop further their understanding of fact and opinion.

Writing

■ At early level, most children form letters correctly and use capital letters and full stops accurately. Most children write to reflect their own experiences and feelings. At first level, most children write well across a range of genre. Most children punctuate their sentences accurately and use common conjunctions. Senior leaders and staff have identified correctly the need to address gaps in children's writing at first level. At second level, most children use paragraphs to separate thoughts and ideas. They select and use different structures and styles to suit the type of text. Across the school, children should continue to have opportunities to write regularly for a range of purposes and audiences.

Numeracy and mathematics

■ Overall, most children make very good progress from prior levels of attainment.

Number, money and measure

■ Across all stages, almost all children are confident in a range of number processes appropriate to their age and stage of development. Most children explain well how they use number facts to solve problems.

■ At early level, most children count confidently within 30. They are confident about the quantities of numbers and show their understanding pictorially, using concrete materials and numerically. Most children at first level understand the place value of a digit in numbers to 1000 and beyond. They demonstrate secure understanding of number facts and bonds which helps them to carry out mental calculations with confidence. A few children should engage in calculations involving greater complexity such as two-part questions. Most children at second level use fractions confidently. They explain equivalence and describe when they would use their learning outwith school and in the future. Most children apply their understanding of money in real-life contexts, relating this to budgeting, investment, discounting and interest. Most children at first and second level are confident using a range of numeracy skills to solve problems involving time.

Shape, position and movement

■ At all stages, most children demonstrate knowledge and skills in shape. They sort, identify and discuss the different features and properties of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects appropriate to their age. At first level, most children use positional language confidently. They are developing confidence in using grid references to locate and describe position. At second level, most children use their understanding of scale to make and interpret simple models, maps and plans. Children require support to develop their understanding and confidence in classifying and measuring angles.

Information handling

■ Across the school, most children gather and use information in a variety of ways. Almost all children at early level explain confidently how they match, sort and organise objects. At first level, most children discuss how to gather data using tally marks and present information in bar graphs, tables, charts and diagrams. Most children at second level use technology to display data simply and to record their analysis. They confidently discuss a range of ways of presenting information and for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Attainment over time

■ Children's overall attainment is consistently above local and national expectations. They maintain high levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy over time. Most children who join the school benefit from significant added value to their learning as they progress through the school.

- Senior leaders have identified a slight decline in children's writing at first level and have clear plans in place to address these gaps in learning. Senior leaders and teachers should continue to review children's data, particularly focusing on raising attainment at first level, to sustain high standards for all learners.

- Senior leaders collate and analyse patterns over time for year groups and identify attainment gaps across the school. They use this robust data to inform targeted and highly impactful interventions for individual children or groups not making expected progress from prior levels. Senior leaders use data rigorously to show that progress from interventions has been sustained. They are well-placed to build on their use of data to measure more rigorously the progress of cohorts over time to reflect their unique context.

- Senior leaders should continue with plans to implement approaches to measure children's progress and attainment over time in all curriculum areas.

Overall quality of learners' achievements

- Children develop an impressive range of skills through taking part in achievement activities. Children improve their leadership and interpersonal skills by organising and participating in several lunchtime clubs. Children across all stages talk confidently about how participation in these clubs leads to more learners feeling included and contributes to the development of friendships. In most classes, children have opportunities for informal and natural leadership as group leaders, supporting their peers and classroom organisation. Children in the upper stages benefit from a range of leadership opportunities. They are able to identify the skills for learning, life and work and attributes they are developing as a result of these responsibilities.

- A few children improve their teamwork, confidence and organisational skills through their roles in the house system. They help to promote the success of peers and develop confidence through leading aspects of assemblies, performances and presentations. These are further enhanced by reading and singing in the choir at Mass. Children in the upper stages have regular opportunities to apply their leadership and organisational skills by being buddies to younger children.

- Children value their achievements being celebrated in a variety of ways within and outwith school. This includes the end-of-year awards ceremony. Senior leaders have developed a helpful system to monitor children's participation in activities to achieve. As planned, staff should support children to profile the acquisition of these skills across the curriculum.

Equity for all learners

- Staff have a comprehensive awareness of children's individual circumstances, including a thorough knowledge of learners who may experience socio-economic disadvantage. Staff support these learners very well to attend and engage in all aspects of the life of the school. Senior leaders and staff have introduced the 'cost of the school day' charter. This includes minimising the cost of activities and trips. School trips are funded creatively through a mix of subsidies from private business, support from the Parent Council and voluntary donations. The Parent Council also organises a well-used uniform service to promote recycling. These approaches help to ensure equity of opportunity.

- Staff and senior leaders carefully track the progress and attainment of learners who may be affected by socio-economic disadvantage. They use this data to demonstrate that almost all children supported through Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) interventions are making good progress and attaining well. Senior leaders should continue to use data and consider a wider range of information to identify all children who may benefit from PEF resources. They also need to use

data more rigorously to demonstrate how use of this fund is closing the poverty-related attainment gap for groups and individuals over time.

■ Senior leaders monitor overall attendance rigorously. They identity children who struggle to sustain regular attendance and work closely with families to reduce absences. Senior leaders follow the local authority policy and use their family liaison support service to help improve individual children's attendance. Senior leaders report that the most effective strategy to improve children's attendance has been to develop positive and trusting relationships with families. They also use PEF to improve the attendance of a small group of identified children. This includes targeted support to help learners transition back to school as well as well-considered initiatives to improve children's confidence. Learners supported through this intervention have significantly improved their attendance.

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 school meals provider.

- Staff are in the early stages of developing a system to help children to track their skills more consistently across curriculum areas. They should continue to build on the project-based learning approach so that skills progression becomes an integral part of all areas of the curriculum.

- Children at all stages learn French. Older children also learn Spanish. Teachers should now ensure that children experience consistently progressive learning to develop their knowledge of the French language.

- Children receive their entitlement to two hours of quality physical education weekly. They benefit from visiting specialist teaching provision in this area of the curriculum. Children also benefit from learning in drama supported by a specialist teacher.

- Children experience a progressive and faith-based pathway for Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools. They learn about other religions, festivals and celebrations through class learning and assemblies.

- Across the school, children experience opportunities for outdoor learning. This includes, for example, learning in science and health and wellbeing where children grow their own produce. Staff should now implement a more consistent and progressive approach to outdoor learning. This should allow children to build on prior learning and skills.

- Children benefit from a well-stocked school library and individual class libraries. Staff are supporting children to develop their literacy skills using these resources with the support of parent helpers. There is a range of texts to support children to learn across different areas of the curriculum.

- Senior leaders involve parents in allocating spend from the PEF. Senior leaders use this funding carefully to fund a range of well-considered literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing interventions.

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.