

Summarised inspection findings

Stirches Primary School

Scottish Borders Council

3 October 2023

Key contextual information

Stirches Primary School was built in 1977. It serves the Stirches local area on the outskirts of Hawick and the area immediately to the north. The school roll is 112 with 29 children enrolled in the Early Learning and Childcare provision. There are five classes in the school comprising P1/2, P2/3, P4/5, P5/6 and P6/7.

The school has experienced significant staffing and leadership changes over the past few years. The headteacher took up post in March 2022. The principal teacher has been appointed this session. A number of teaching staff work on a part-time basis.

Approximately 25% of children come from homes designated as within Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles one and two. The majority of children reside in homes within SIMD decile five. The current attendance level is 89.27% which shows an increase from last year

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

- Following an initial review of the context of the school, the headteacher focused immediately on building a positive and caring culture. There is now a nurturing culture and children say they feel valued. Most children say that school helps them to understand and respect other people. Parents, staff and children comment positively on the changed climate in the school since the headteacher arrived. Children behave very well and there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in all classes. Relationships amongst staff and with pupils are kind and respectful and children are happy and secure. The culture of respect where almost all staff listen and respond positively to children, demonstrates how the rights of children are enacted daily. Most children feel safe in school, although a minority are unsure if they do or do not feel safe. A minority of children feel that other children do not treat them with respect. The headteacher should continue with plans to extend discussions with children about understanding others and respecting differences.
- Staff and senior leaders work well together to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers welcome the collaborative approach to leading and supporting their work. At the start of each new session, staff receive a clear 'Welcome Back' guide. The 'Ready to Learn' policy outlines clearly how staff, parents and children should work together to achieve success for all children. In addition, there is a 'Framework for Learning'. The three documents outline very clearly the expectations of all staff in contributing to high quality experiences for children. This is beginning to lead to a coherent and well understood approach to children's learning. Teachers and support staff work very well together to provide experiences that children enjoy in most classes.

- In a few classrooms, experiences are enriching and relevant when children choose the topics they learn. In these classes, teachers plan activities to make sure all children work at an appropriate level and are able to extend their learning at an appropriate pace. In a few classes, children are leading their own learning, although this now needs to be extended across all classes. The headteacher and staff agree that teachers need to respond flexibly to incidental and unplanned learning. Teachers should continue to develop this aspect of practice.
- In most lessons, teachers need to ensure all children are fully engaged, motivated and remain on task. Teachers need to differentiate lessons better and plan learning to suit individual needs. Most lessons are overly teacher led and teachers now need to increase the pace of learning within lessons.
- Digital learning is led by staff and evident in all classes and children use tablets to research and help them respond to class activities. Digital approaches are supporting a few children to extend their learning. A few children who work at a different pace, may need a different approach to learning using digital technology. Teachers prepare interesting lessons, but could make greater use of digital technologies as well as outdoor learning to further enhance learning and motivation.
- All teachers explain the purpose of learning and use measures of success to help children understand what they need to do to succeed. Most children understand what teachers expect of them. A few teachers use stimulating questions to promote curiosity and challenge learning. Teachers should continue to develop these skills across the school to improve attainment further. Teachers should continue to work together to develop aspects of practice such as use of teacher voice, higher-order questioning, verbal feedback to support learning and checking for understanding. The headteacher has set high expectations and all staff now need to reflect on their own practice. This reflection will be important in ensuring consistent, highly effective classroom practice.
- Teachers have made a positive start to implementing approaches to play. They have created purposeful environments and used spaces well to encourage children's curiosity. As planned, teachers should continue to develop approaches to play-based learning. They should continue to engage in professional reading using national practice guidance such as *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* (2020) to develop their thinking.
- Teachers write feedback in jotters and this is helping a few children understand what they need to do next. This approach is at an early stage and teachers along with children should continue to consider what feedback leads to the best outcomes. The headteacher has introduced summative assessments to support teacher's understanding of progress. She should proceed to develop a more holistic approach to assessment linked clearly to planning, learning and teaching.
- The headteacher has introduced more robust approaches to tracking and assessing children's progress. Teachers discuss individual pupil progress and use data to highlight which children may need support. Children would benefit from agreeing individual targets so that they clearly understand what they need to do to improve their learning across the curriculum.
- The headteacher is aware that a next step is to develop procedures to moderate children's work. This should include internal school moderation as well as moderation beyond the school.

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, levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. Attainment data for session 2021-2022 show that overall, at early, first and second levels, the majority of children achieved national standards in literacy and English. Overall, a minority of children achieved national standards in numeracy and mathematics at early, first and second levels.
- Most children make satisfactory progress from prior levels of attainment. Most children who require additional support are making satisfactory progress towards their individual targets, with a few making good progress.
- Across the school, children are capable of making better progress. The headteacher acknowledges the need to work closely with all staff to raise levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy. Staff have implemented a range of well-planned universal and targeted interventions. As a result, children's overall levels of attainment have increased for session 2022-2023. As planned, staff should continue to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, children make satisfactory progress in literacy and English.

Listening and talking

- Most children at early level respond appropriately to each other and to staff. They are developing their confidence in sharing their ideas. Most children at first level communicate clearly and audibly. A few children need further support to remain focused and interact with others during group discussions. Most children at second level interact with each other well and share their views. A few can articulate complex subjects with confidence. Children in the upper stages would benefit from more opportunities to develop their listening and talking skills within a wider range of audiences.

Reading

- At early level, most children use their knowledge of sounds and letters to decode simple words. They enjoy reading books and talking about characters. The majority of children at first level talk with enthusiasm about their favourite author and the types of books they like. They can describe the main features of fiction and non-fiction books. The majority of children at second level read fluently and with expression. A few children working at second level need more support to be immersed in reading and develop a love of books. They would benefit from further opportunities to discuss characters and plots in their allocated school reading book in more detail. The school has a well-stocked attractive library area. Children borrow books regularly, which is fostering their enjoyment of reading.

Writing

- Across the school, almost all children write in a range of genres including recounts and newspaper reports. Most children at early level write short sentences independently, using their knowledge of sounds to spell out words. At first level, the majority of children punctuate and write more extended texts, using joining words and paragraphs well. The majority of children at second level use paragraphs and more complex sentences successfully in their writing. At first and second levels, teachers should encourage children to present extended pieces of writing work to a high standard.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children make satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. Staff recognise the need to raise attainment in this area. Staff have implemented helpful approaches to identifying and closing gaps in children's learning. They are beginning to raise levels of attainment in numeracy. Teachers should ensure that children revisit mathematical concepts regularly in a planned, progressive way. This should ensure that children have opportunities to consolidate their knowledge.

Number, money and measure

- Most children at early level recognise numbers up to 30 and beyond. They add and subtract numbers within ten confidently. A minority of children at first level identify the place value of digits within numbers to thousands. They are less confident about the value of zero as a place holder. Most use a range of measuring instruments successfully to estimate and measure length, weight and capacity. At second level, a minority of children identify numbers confidently up to one million. They use a range of strategies to complete addition, subtraction, multiplication and division problems accurately. They convert units of measure such as metres into centimetres successfully.

Shape, position and movement

- Most children at early level identify a range of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects successfully. The majority of children at first level can describe the properties of three-dimensional shapes using terms such as face, edge and side. They use protractors accurately to measure and name angles. A minority of children at second level name the properties of three-dimensional objects. They are less confident describing the relationship between the radius and diameter in circles.

Information handling

- Most children at early level recognise and continue patterns according to specific criteria such as shape and colour. At first level, a minority of children interpret information from simple bar graphs accurately to ask and answer questions. At second level, a minority of children gather and display information successfully on a range of graphs and charts. They interpret information accurately to ask questions and draw conclusions. They would benefit from opportunities to use digital technology to display data on graphs and charts.

Attainment over time

- Senior leaders have implemented a clear strategy to raise levels of attainment through targeted and universal interventions. This is leading to increased levels of attainment. As planned, staff should maintain a clear focus on raising children's levels of attainment.
- Over the last few years, a range of factors, including COVID-19, has meant that attainment data over time is not yet fully reliable. The headteacher has introduced more robust tracking and useful assessment processes this session. These are beginning to support teachers' understanding of national standards and helping them to use and analyse assessment data

more accurately. Teachers should engage further with the National Benchmarks to support their planned assessments to measure children's progress. As planned, teachers should also engage in moderation activities with colleagues from other schools. This will support their professional judgements of children's achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children enjoy receiving 'Stirches Superstars' certificates weekly. This encourages them to recognise that they are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Staff celebrate children's wider achievements twice a year during assemblies, online and on the celebration wall. They share children's classroom achievements on 'Above and Beyond' displays. This is building children's confidence well and developing their sense of pride in their accomplishments. As a next step, staff should support children to articulate the skills they are developing.
- Staff track children's achievements on a whole school tracker. They identify children who are at risk of missing out and plan meaningful opportunities to help them achieve success.
- Children represent the school in various sporting competitions which is building their communication and teamwork skills. Children enjoy leadership roles which are developing their citizenship skills successfully. For example, as house captains, Junior Road Safety Officers or as playground buddies.
- Children participate in local community events such as singing at the Hawick Common Riding event or performing at the Reivers Festival. This is helping children to feel valued members of the local community.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a good understanding of contextual factors that impact on the lives of children and their families. Children enjoy participating in these activities. They offer a range of free after school clubs and experiences at little or no cost to ensure no child misses out. The Parent Council supports the school well by providing financial support for children who need it through fundraising events.
- Staff have made significant progress in implementing universal and targeted nurture approaches to support children's wellbeing. As a result, children feel more included and are more ready to learn.
- The headteacher uses Pupil Equity Funding well to implement targeted interventions in literacy, numeracy and in health and wellbeing. Senior leaders track and monitor the impact of this work carefully. There is evidence to demonstrate that these interventions are accelerating children's progress in closing identified gaps.

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.