

# Summarised inspection findings

**St Mark's Primary School**

North Ayrshire Council

6 February 2024

## Key contextual information

St. Mark's Primary School and Nursery Class is a denominational school serving the old town area of Irvine. The headteacher has been in post for five years and is supported by a deputy headteacher and two principal teachers. The school roll is 224 children. There are nine classes, including three composite classes. A majority of children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) deciles 1 to 2. Children's attendance at the school is generally in line with the national average. Exclusions have increased from none in 2021/22 to a few in 2022/23. In September 2022, the school reported that 33% of children had additional support needs.

St. Mark's Nursery Class was inspected by the Care Inspectorate within the past 18 months, therefore, the local authority and headteacher had the option to include the nursery class as part of this inspection. We have agreed with the local authority and school that the nursery class is not part of this inspection. The findings set out below are for the primary school stages.

### 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 school's vision, values and aims, underpinned by the Gospel values, support a positive climate for learning. Children benefit from nurturing and mutually respectful relationships with staff. Staff create a strong sense of community and know children and their families well. Children are polite, well-mannered and enthusiastic. They are proud to be part of their school.
- Most teachers have established well-organised classrooms, providing a positive atmosphere for learning. Children are attentive and listen well. A few children need further help to ensure they engage consistently with their learning, particularly during group work. Most teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. Staff create attractive wall displays to celebrate children's work effectively.
- Teachers have focused appropriately on improving children's access to interesting learning environments. Staff are extending the use of outdoor learning with the natural environment promoting children's sense of discovery. In a majority of lessons, teachers use digital technology creatively to engage children meaningfully. Children confidently use the internet and digital platforms to complete research and to display their work well. Teachers should continue to develop their use of creative and relevant contexts for learning. Children would benefit from more opportunities to exercise personalisation and choice, and to lead aspects of their learning. This will further children's motivation for learning.
- Staff create an interesting environment for learning through play in the early years. Children have opportunities to be curious and creative in inviting spaces indoors and outdoors. For most children at early level, this supports, enhances and consolidates learning across the curriculum. Staff need to ensure this approach meets the needs of all children as they move

into first level and beyond. They should continue to engage with national guidance and professional learning to develop play pedagogy further.

- In a minority of lessons, teachers use starter activities effectively to focus children on the topic being explored. Most teachers support children well to make links between prior and current learning. A majority of teachers share the purpose of learning, and in a minority of lessons these are linked appropriately to measures of success. However, measures of success too often focus on the completion of tasks rather than how children show progress in their learning. In a few lessons, teachers skilfully reference the purpose of learning and what successful learning looks like. They review progress with children using plenaries well at the end of a lesson. This practice should be developed further and embedded across the school.
- Most teachers offer children regular praise and encouragement. This helps children recognise when they are doing well in their learning. A majority of teachers use questioning appropriately to check for children's understanding. However, most teachers need to develop their use of questioning to support children to think more deeply about their learning. This will help develop children's higher order thinking skills.
- Most teachers should now improve the pace and challenge of learning, and have higher expectations of children, to ensure all children achieve to their full potential.
- Children require more individual and specific feedback to support their understanding of what they are doing well and their next steps in learning. Teachers should develop the consistency and quality of feedback offered to children. They should set higher expectations of the content and presentation of children's work, particularly in jotters. Teachers are beginning to work with children to set helpful termly targets for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Senior leaders should continue with plans to work with staff to ensure all targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. Staff should ensure that targets support children, and their parents, to identify clearly their next steps in learning and improve children's literacy and numeracy skills.
- Staff should continue to work together to develop their shared understanding of the features of high-quality learning and teaching in St. Mark's Primary. This should be informed by the views of children and parents. Staff should continue to work together to embed these features to improve the consistency of learners' experiences across the school. Staff should continue to explore research, share good practice, and engage in well-considered professional learning.
- Pupil support assistants work positively with identified children who require additional support with their learning. They offer effective interventions which helps children to improve in literacy and numeracy. A few children benefit from enhanced wellbeing support through the nurture provision. Senior leaders and staff should now review these approaches to ensure that, where possible, more children access support within their classroom. Teachers should increase their use of differentiated learning to meet better the needs of all learners in class.
- Teachers must continue to develop their use of assessment further to support improved professional judgements of children's progress. They currently use literacy and numeracy summative assessments, as well as standardised assessments, to measure children's attainment. Formative assessment strategies are not yet used consistently across the school. Teachers would benefit from professional learning to refresh their understanding of formative assessment. This will help them to have a clearer picture of how well children understand their learning. Teachers should continue to develop their assessment planning to ensure all children demonstrate how they are building on previous learning. They should consider how they adapt their teaching following assessments to ensure all children progress in their learning.

- Senior leaders need to ensure all teachers regularly moderate children's work to improve the accuracy of teacher judgements. This is not yet happening consistently. Senior leaders should also reintroduce moderation with external colleagues across the learning community.
- Teachers plan learning collaboratively with stage partners. They have successfully updated their approaches to school level planning this year. The agreed planning format links learning to national Benchmarks well. Positively, the format supports teachers to record their reflections on the success of planned learning and next steps. Senior leaders and teachers should evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches to planning and its impact on children's progress. Senior leaders should consider how children can have greater involvement in planning learning. This will help them to be more active participants in their learning.
- Senior leaders have recently improved their approaches to monitoring and tracking the progress and attainment of children. They meet termly with teachers to review information and identify children who are not on track in their learning. Senior leaders and teachers identify children who require additional support and appropriate interventions are put in place to support their learning. Teachers should develop their confidence in using data to review children's progress. This will help them to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and determine if they are improving children's outcomes.

## 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

- School data shows that in June 2023 most children at P1, P4 and P7 achieved expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in reading and listening and talking. Most children at P7, and a majority at P1 and P4, achieved expected CfE levels in writing. Most children at P1 and P7, and a majority at P4, achieved expected CfE levels in numeracy. Most children who require support with learning and those impacted by adverse circumstances are making satisfactory progress towards their own targets.
- Children working within early and first level have significant gaps in learning in literacy and numeracy. Staff need to address these gaps to ensure current predictions for June 2024 are achievable.
- Senior leaders have recently introduced more robust systems to review children's progress in learning. They recognise the need to improve the accuracy of teacher professional judgement about children's levels of attainment. Teachers should develop their use of assessment, and engage in regular moderation, to improve the consistency of judgements, particularly in listening and talking.

### Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, most children make satisfactory progress in literacy and English. A few children make good progress. Children working within levels require further support in aspects of literacy. Children working at early level need support to learn their sounds and in forming letters correctly. Children working at first level need to develop decoding strategies. All children working within levels need more opportunities to write both short and extended texts, with time to improve writing after feedback from teachers.

### Listening and talking

- Children who achieved early level join in with known songs and rhymes. They retell favourite stories and answer questions about them well. Children who have achieved first level discuss confidently the plot and characters of texts they have heard. At early and first level children often need support in knowing when to listen to others and when to talk and share their views. At second level most children listen well to others, and confidently express their view, with evidence for their opinion. Most children at second level would benefit from more regular opportunities to present to an audience to practise their presentation skills.

### Reading

- Children who have achieved early level use their knowledge of sounds and blends to read simple words. They would benefit from increased opportunities to practise sounds and blends and tricky words. Children who have achieved first level read with increasing fluency.

They understand the difference between fiction and non-fiction texts. At first level children need to widen their knowledge of genres and authors and explain why they like an author or type of book. At second level most children confidently discuss texts and consider plot, characters and predict possible endings. At second level most children often use search engines for research. They need opportunities to use non-fiction texts when researching to understand their features better.

## **Writing**

- Children who have achieved early level attempt to write simple words and sentences. They are beginning to use full stops and capital letters. They need to practise correct letter formation and develop their confidence in the sounds of all lowercase letters. Children who have achieved first level are beginning to understand how to write factual text with headings and an introduction. At second level children are familiar with the features of language, including similes and metaphors. They need to extend this knowledge and use the tools regularly in writing tasks. Across all stages, children need more regular opportunities to write in a range of genres, for extended and short writing tasks.

## **Numeracy and mathematics**

- Most children are making satisfactory progress in numeracy and mathematics. Children working within levels require further support in a range of topics. These include subtraction, time, problem solving, and information handling. Children's presentation of work in numeracy and mathematics is variable across the school. Teachers should support children to display their calculations neatly and accurately.

## **Number, money and measure**

- Children who have achieved early level add numbers correctly up to 10. A few need support subtracting numbers within 10. Most children know the sequence of the days of the week but are unsure of the months of the year. Children who have achieved first level confidently round numbers to the nearest 100. They need to develop confidence when carrying out subtraction calculations. At second level children multiply and divide correctly using written method for large numbers and mentally for one or two-digit calculations. They need more opportunities to develop confidence when using common fraction and decimal fractions. Across the school, children would benefit from more exposure to money and budgets.

## **Shape, position and movement**

- Almost all children who have achieved early level, identify two-dimensional shapes. They are less familiar with the names and features of three-dimensional (3D) objects. Children who have achieved first level draw and describe shapes correctly, such as hexagon and octagon. At second level, children use language such as faces and vertices to describe 3D objects. They are less familiar with terms such as circumference and diameter.

## **Information handling**

- Almost all children who have achieved early level use a simple bar graph to interpret information and make comparisons. Children at first level extract information from graphs. They need to gather and display data using different graphs and charts. Children at second level understand bar and line graphs and how to collate and present information. They describe benefits of presenting data in this way. Children are less familiar with pie charts. They need more opportunities to use digital tools to collect and display information.

## **Attainment over time**

- Senior leaders gather data over time. This data evidences clearly that most children make satisfactory progress against prior levels of attainment. Senior leaders and staff should continue to develop their ability to analyse and use data effectively. This will support staff to accelerate children's progress in literacy and numeracy over time.

- For a few children requiring help with literacy and numeracy, support and interventions need to be reviewed to ensure they are well-planned. Senior leaders need to ensure the impact of interventions are measured more effectively to show children's progress in closing learning gaps.

### **Overall quality of learners' achievements**

- Children participate in a wide range of clubs, activities and events that help them to develop new skills and increase confidence. They talk positively about activities including athletics, talent shows and skiing. Fit Fridays help children try out new activities like Taekwondo. These help children develop their approaches to keeping healthy. Through activities such as children's rights and eco committees, children develop understanding about their role in society and how they can contribute to global issues. Staff now need to help all children understand better the skills they are developing through their achievements.
- Children are proud of their achievements which are celebrated well in school. Wow Wednesdays and Tell it Tuesdays allow children to showcase awards and achievements. Staff identify the need to track participation and achievements out with school to ensure all children have opportunities to achieve success. Children in P5 to P7, participate in Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS). This allows children to gain accreditation and develop skills in a range of award contexts including Get Active, Stay Active and Adventure.
- The school has strong links with partners and works effectively with the local and wider community. These links help children to develop important skills, such as communication, interpersonal and leadership skills. For example, children regularly visit a local care home. This helps positive intergenerational relationships between children and residents. Children now understand issues that impact on the elderly such as loneliness and dementia.

### **Equity for all learners**

- The headteacher, staff and partners are dedicated to supporting children and families impacted by poverty. Staff work with partners to support sensitively families experiencing financial barriers with school-related and other expenses, including food and fuel. The staff team are committed to nurturing approaches. A well-attended daily breakfast club is free and open to all children. This is run in partnership with the parish church, a local business and grant applications. Children and families greatly appreciate this support. It helps children to have a positive start to their day.
- The school receives a considerable amount of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Senior leaders use PEF to employ additional staffing. These staff support play pedagogy and deliver interventions for identified children requiring additional support to close gaps in learning. Senior leaders are not yet able to evidence the impact of PEF on closing poverty related attainment gaps. They should ensure a continued focus on the impact and sustainability of PEF to support all identified children to make accelerated progress in closing gaps. Senior leaders should also involve parents more fully in decisions about how PEF is spent.
- Attendance is in line with national figures. Senior leaders review attendance monthly. There are children whose regular attendance continues to be challenging. The headteacher is proactive in supporting children and families with attendance. She works with partners to provide appropriate support. The school is beginning to see improvements in a few children's regular attendance.



## Other relevant evidence

- Across the school children enjoy opportunities to select books from well-resourced classroom libraries.
- Children across the school receive their entitlement to two hours of physical education per week. Teachers should continue to focus on improving the quality of learners' experiences by offering a greater range of challenging activities. Children should be offered more opportunities to develop leadership skills within physical education.

## 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.