

Summarised inspection findings

Balmerino Primary School and Nursery Class

Fife Council

30 May 2023

Key contextual information

Balmerino Primary School and Nursery Class is located in the village of Gauldry in Fife. The school has a large, rural catchment area covering a number of villages, hamlets and farms. Most children live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) area 8. However, the school recognises the diverse socio-economic circumstances of rural communities.

The headteacher has been in post since August 2020. She is also the headteacher of Wormit Primary School and Nursery Class. The shared headship was established when the current headteacher took up post. The school has experienced a number of staffing challenges over the past two years.

The school roll has fallen in recent years. Forty-nine children currently attend the school across two multi-composite classes. At the time of the inspection there were no children at Primary 1.

Attendance is consistently higher than the national average. The school receives a small amount of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF).

1.3 Leadership of change

good

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 headteacher has been in post since August 2020. She provides effective leadership to the school community. Staff and parents value her friendly, open and nurturing approach. They believe she has high expectations for all learners and prioritises improving outcomes for children. The school community values and appreciates the difference she is making for children and families at Balmerino Primary School and Nursery Class. The staff team work well with the headteacher to ensure children experience positive relationships with staff and their peers.
- The school has a well-established set of aims. Children articulate confidently these aims of opportunity, wellbeing, learning and support (OWLS). The headteacher worked with the school community to create a vision statement and sets of values to sit alongside the OWLS. The vision statement 'Our School, Our Future', is well understood by the school community. The values are organised under two headings of learning and wellbeing. Children are beginning to link the vision, values and aims to their experiences in school. The headteacher should continue to monitor the relevance of the vision, values and aims and children's understanding of how they all link together. In particular, staff should consider how these interconnect with their work on children's rights to ensure it does not become too complex.
- The headteacher articulates well the impact of the pandemic on school improvement. She outlines clearly in standards and quality reports, the successes and areas where further improvement is still required. In particular, she recognises the need to embed further approaches to improving attainment in writing and developing approaches to planning learning.

The headteacher has effectively managed a few staffing challenges over the last year. This has impacted on the pace of change. There is now a stable staff team in place who are ready and eager to work with the headteacher to increase the pace of change.

- The headteacher and staff gather a range of information about the work of the school. Parents views are gathered through a range of questionnaires. Children's views are gathered through the assembly programme. The headteacher uses this information well to inform school improvement priorities. The current school improvement priorities are appropriate and focus on outdoor learning, approaches to teaching writing, progression in French and parental engagement. These are displayed in child friendly language in the hall. The display is updated regularly with children's views on progress across the year. Parents are aware of the priorities. The headteacher should continue to involve all members of the school community to evaluate the work of the school and inform future improvements.
- The school benefits from an active Parent Council. The Parent Council organise a range of fundraising events across the school year. They are proud of the contributions they make to purchasing resources and funding school trips. The Parent Council are also keen to support families with the cost of living. They recently organised a pre-loved uniform and clothing event. The Parent Council are keen to support children to play an active role in their local community. They link with the local community hall committee to ensure children have meaningful opportunities to engage in the life of the village. The headteacher should continue to work with the Parent Council to drive forward improvement within the school.
- Children across the school are beginning to take on meaningful leadership roles. For example, older children are house captains and sports leaders. The headteacher should build on this positive start to support all children to lead change across the school.
- All staff are proud to work at Balmerino Primary School. They recognise the strengths of their colleagues and how they learn from each other. Teachers engage in a range of relevant professional learning, including masters level study. Each teacher has a specific area of focus for their professional learning, for example, play, outdoor learning and writing. They share their practice informally through discussion. Moving forward, the headteacher should support staff to develop further their leadership across the school. They should develop a strategic approach to sharing their learning with a clear focus on improving learners' experiences across the school.
- The headteacher seeks the views of colleagues on the quality of learning and teaching through the learning partnership. Local authority colleagues and peer headteachers provide valuable feedback on the work of the school. The headteacher has rightly recognised the need to develop a more strategic approach to quality assurance within the school. In taking this forward, she should work with teachers to agree the most appropriate activities to undertake. The headteacher should ensure identified strengths and next steps impact positively on children's experiences.

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

- All staff know children and their families very well. They work well together to ensure children experience an ethos and culture where wellbeing and positive relationships are prioritised. Children throughout the school are friendly, articulate and well-mannered. They are considerate of one another and of visitors to the school. Children are beginning to learn about their rights and are ready to work towards accreditation. This will support further their positive relationships and understanding of respect. They are developing well as confident and responsible citizens.
- In most lessons, children are motivated and engage well in their learning. In a few lessons, children exercise choice and have opportunities to lead their learning. This is particularly evident in social studies and science. Children are particularly motivated and respond well to learning outdoors and within the local community. Children talk positively about weekly visits to the local forest. Across the school, children have opportunities to work in pairs and groups. In a few lessons, a few children need support to engage well in paired and group activities. In almost all lessons, teachers explain the purpose of the learning and support children to co-construct 'steps to success.' This is supporting children to understanding how to be successful in their learning.
- Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers' explanations and instructions are clear. However, in a few lessons, a few children do not always listen to the instructions and explanations. Teachers use questioning effectively to engage whole classes and groups. They use a range of questions well to check children's understanding and deepen their thinking. Teachers use technology very well to enrich learning experiences. Children successfully use digital technology to record data, carry out research and share their learning with their families. The headteacher has worked with staff to develop approaches to providing quality feedback to children. In most lessons, teachers provide children with verbal feedback on what they are doing well and their next steps in learning. Approaches to providing written feedback are not yet consistent across the school. Teachers now need to ensure written feedback is high-quality and supports children to progress with their learning.
- Children set individual targets in literacy and numeracy. Children refer to their targets which are displayed in classrooms. They take photographs and videos of their work and upload them to an online platform. This supports children to see the progress they are making. Teachers should continue to develop this approach to support children to reflect on their learning and demonstrate the progress in a range of contexts across the curriculum.
- Teachers deliver lessons which are well-structured. They make use of a range of learning spaces across the school. Younger children learn through play in a bright, well-resourced breakout room. Teachers should build on this to consider how space could be used across the school to support children's creativity, curiosity and independence. In a few lessons, the

pace of learning is too slow. Teachers should increase the pace of learning to ensure children experience appropriate challenge in their learning.

- Teachers use a range of appropriate assessments to gather evidence of children's progress. They are developing approaches to assessing writing using National Benchmarks. The team should continue to develop further a shared understanding of the assessment process. This should ensure assessment is integral to the planning process.
- Teachers engage well in moderation activities with colleagues within the school. They have had a particular focus on writing. As a result, they have a clear understanding of attainment data and make accurate professional judgements on children's progress within a level. Teachers should build on this and engage with staff from other schools. This will support further their use of assessment evidence.
- Teachers use the school planning for learning format which ensures coverage of appropriate experiences and outcomes from Curriculum for Excellence across all levels. They create more in-depth weekly planning of learning and teaching that responds to children's needs and interests. Across the school, there is a strong ethos of collegiality and positive working relationships.
- Class teachers have helpful meetings with the headteacher three times per session to discuss children's progress and attainment. Teachers have a strong understanding of children's individual progress and next steps. They use National Benchmarks well to support their judgement on children's progress. The data gathered informs their planning and interventions to support learning.

2.2 Curriculum: Learning pathways

- Teachers use local authority progression pathways to plan learning in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Learning pathways are based on the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. They support children well to build on their prior learning. Teachers should now ensure flexible, progression pathways are developed and used to plan learning across all curriculum areas.
- Teachers plan enjoyable and relevant learning experiences that ensure that children can see the link between their learning and life beyond school. For example, older children enjoy researching influential historical and current people, such as engineers, who have had a positive impact on the world. This is developing children's skills for learning, life and work very well. The headteacher and staff are well placed to develop this approach further.
- Teachers have taken positive steps to ensure the curriculum is relevant to the schools' unique context. Children have participated in cycling lessons on local roads and used local bus timetables in mathematics to learn about routes to nearby towns. This supports children to develop an understanding of challenges and benefits of their local community.
- Children currently learn French as their main modern language. Teachers ensure children experience progression and depth in their learning. The headteacher should take forward plans to introduce Spanish as a third language. This will ensure children experience a 1+2 languages approach.
- All teachers incorporate high-quality outdoor learning into their planning. They use the local area well to enrich children's experiences through outdoor learning. Children develop a range of skills in leadership, communication and problem solving through their experiences at the local forest. They also apply their learning from other curricular areas. For example, children learn about compass points, directional language and angles and apply this in orienteering.

2.7 Partnerships: Impact on learners – parental engagement

- The headteacher prioritises positive relationships with families. Together with staff she has established a strong sense of community. Parents appreciate the high visibility of the headteacher. Almost all parents are confident in approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem. Children and families who are new to the school believe they have been well supported during the transition. This ensures children are settled and happy at school.
- Staff recognise the impact of pandemic mitigations on their ability to engage with parents over the past two years. The introduction and development of digital approaches helped overcome some of these barriers. Parents now welcome an increased focus on receiving communication around learning and teaching through the online profiling programme. Staff have rightly identified the need to re-introduce parent workshops and in-person events.
- Parents value the improved communication between the school and home. A comprehensive website and regular updates from the headteacher, ensures all parents are aware of events and changes within the school.

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. Inspectors have identified good practice in child protection and safeguarding procedures.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

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

- All children learn in inclusive, nurturing classrooms. They benefit from all staff modelling respectful relationships between each other, and with learners. Children across the school get on well with staff and one another. They interact with each other and adults with respect, care and empathy. Almost all children believe adults in the school treat them fairly and with respect. Children are learning about their rights using Snowie, their rights mascot. This whole school approach supports children to reinforce and extend their knowledge of rights.
- Children articulate confidently how the school supports them to improve aspects of their health and wellbeing. Younger children talk about healthy food choices. They use their knowledge to create recipes for healthy pasta salads. Older children recognise that the range of sport and physical activity helps improve their physical health. For example, their cycling lessons and trip to climb a local hill builds their stamina and fitness levels. Teachers should build on this to support children to reflect on their own wellbeing and plan ways to improve it further.
- The headteacher rightly identified a need to update the procedures for recording and monitoring incidents of bullying behaviour. She updated all processes and the policy to ensure they reflect national guidance. Her careful monitoring identified the need to support children to manage conflict and ask for adult support. The headteacher worked with children to develop the 'Stand Up, Get Help' approach. As a result, children articulate confidently how to respond to and manage conflict in relationships. All children feel safe at school and almost all children identify an adult they can talk to if they are worried or upset. The school is able to demonstrate a significant reduction in incidents of bullying behaviour following the introduction of the 'Stand Up, Get Help' approach.
- Children enjoy spending time together in the school grounds at break times and lunchtimes. They benefit from regular opportunities to play and learn outdoors. A few children require support in the playground. The headteacher has researched ways to develop the playground to ensure it is inclusive and meets the needs of all children. Staff have worked with children to plan improvements to the school grounds. Children identified the need for a range of different areas including quiet spaces, small spaces with activities such as arts and crafts and large loose parts play. This will support children to engage meaningfully in play with their peers and support further inclusion across all aspects of school life.
- Teachers plan learning activities based on health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes. Older children benefit from a visit from a national organisation to discuss substance misuse. Teachers plan lessons using the cross-cutting themes of diversity and gender equality. As a result children are able to challenge discrimination and identify gender stereotypes. The headteacher should now work with staff to develop greater coherence in the health and wellbeing curriculum from P1 to P7. This will ensure children develop skills and knowledge across all aspects of the health and wellbeing curriculum.

- All staff understand and apply the statutory requirements and codes of practice in relation to child protection as a result of rigorous training and guidance. There is a strong understanding of what is expected and how this might affect children and families. Robust systems are in place to support child protection procedures and keep children safe.
- Staff have strong approaches to identifying and supporting children who require additional help with their learning. The headteacher maintains an overview of concerns, assessment data and the outcomes of interventions. Staff work well together to assess the needs of children who are facing barriers to their learning. Teachers have a good understanding of the additional support needs of children in their class and use a range of strategies to help them overcome these barriers. The headteacher values the role of partners in supporting children to access their learning. She works well with a range of partners to support children's language development and emotional wellbeing. This ensures children and families receive appropriate and timely support. Child's plans outline clearly the steps adults should take to ensure children are included and access their learning. The headteacher should ensure individualised plans clearly outline children's individual targets. She should include children, families and partners in setting clear measurable targets with realistic timescales. This will support everyone involved to measure the success of supports and interventions.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- The number of children at each stage varies and is relatively small. Overall statements have been made about attainment and progress to ensure individuals are not identified.
- School achievement of a level data for session 2021/22 shows most children at early level achieved expected Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) levels in reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy and mathematics. Most children at first level, achieved expected CfE levels in writing and numeracy and mathematics. All children at first level achieved expected CfE levels in reading and listening and talking. At second level, a majority of children achieved expected CfE levels in writing and most achieved expected CfE levels in reading, listening and talking and numeracy and mathematics.
- Overall, children make good progress through early, first and second CfE levels. Children with additional support needs make good progress from their prior levels of attainment.

Attainment in literacy and English

- Overall, attainment in literacy and English is good. Most children make good progress in reading, writing and talking and listening.

Listening and talking

- Across the school, children interact well with each other and adults. They articulate their views confidently. Children listen carefully to the ideas and opinions of their peers. A few children require support to listen to others and take turns in social situations and group tasks.

Reading

- Across the school, children read a range of texts with increasing fluency. Younger children use their knowledge of phonics to decode unfamiliar words with increasing accuracy. Older children use intonation well when reading aloud. Younger children describe characters in their class novels and predict what might happen next in a story. Older children use dictionaries to find out the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. Older children answer questions about familiar texts. They are not yet confident at identifying and answering questions that involve inference and evaluation.

Writing

- Across the school, children write across a range of genre and for a range of purposes. Younger children create a range of short texts using a new structured planning format to guide their work. They spell a majority of familiar words correctly. Older children use increasingly complex sentences in their writing. They organise ideas logically in paragraphs. Across the school, children need support to improve their presentation, spelling and use of punctuation in their extended writing.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, attainment in numeracy and mathematics is good. Most children make good progress in numeracy and mathematics.

Number, money and measure

- Across the school, most children carry out a variety of calculations accurately. Younger children recognise and use a range of coins and notes to pay for items in the class shop. They use subtraction skills to calculate change. Older children select the most effective strategy to calculate a percentage of a given amount. They explain numerical patterns in relationships between percentage, decimals and fractions. Across the school, children are not yet confident at identifying and using a range of mental maths strategies.

Shape, position and movement

- Younger children identify a range of two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects using appropriate mathematical vocabulary. Older children use positional and directional language to describe, follow and record locations, routes and directions.

Information handling

- Children across the school use tally charts and bar graphs to collate and present data for their house system at weekly assemblies. Older children are not yet confident in gathering, analysing and interpreting data.

Attainment over time

- The headteacher is acutely aware of the needs of all learners. She has processes in place to track attainment of individual children in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics over time. The headteacher works with staff to ensure data is used effectively to plan support to close gaps for individual learners. This is ensuring all children are making appropriate progress over time.

Overall quality of learner's achievements

- Children's achievements both in and out with school are valued and celebrated. They are proudly displayed across the school. These include sporting successes, musical performances and enjoyment of reading. Children are proud of their wide-ranging achievements and talk confidently about how the school celebrates their successes. They feel valued by the staff and their peers.
- Children participate in a range of events and groups within school. Older children value their role as reading buddies with younger children. Children who are peer mediators are proud of their role in ensuring the playground is a safe and happy space for all. Children on the Sports Committee enjoy the responsibility of organising weekly activities and planning sports day. At Primary 7, children enjoy spending time with older members of their community at the Thursday café. Children who take part in these activities talk confidently about the skills they are developing as a result of their participation. Staff should continue to plan opportunities for all children to participate in activities across the school and wider community. They should develop further approaches to track children's participation to help identify any child at risk of missing out.

Equity for all learners

- All staff have a strong understanding of the range of barriers to learning children may face. They are particularly aware of the unique opportunities and challenges children living in a rural community face. The headteacher keeps a check on the progress and attainment of all children with potential barriers to their learning. Teachers work effectively with each other to identify specific gaps in children's learning during termly planning and tracking meetings.

They act quickly to plan and implement strategies to close the gaps. Teachers have introduced assistive technology to support a few learners. This is having a very positive impact on their progress. The headteacher effectively tracks the progress and attainment of the most vulnerable children. There is robust evidence to demonstrate staff are beginning to close the attainment gap.

Practice worth sharing more widely

The headteacher has in place robust approaches to ensuring all children are safe. Staff participate in two child protection training events each year. In addition to their annual training in August, all staff participate in further training in February. This second session has a specific focus linked to local child protection and safeguarding issues. In February 2023, this was informed by Police Scotland information on domestic violence in the Fife area.

All staff have a strong understanding of their role in safeguarding and child protection. They make effective use of chronologies to record concerns and to identify appropriate supports and next steps.

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.